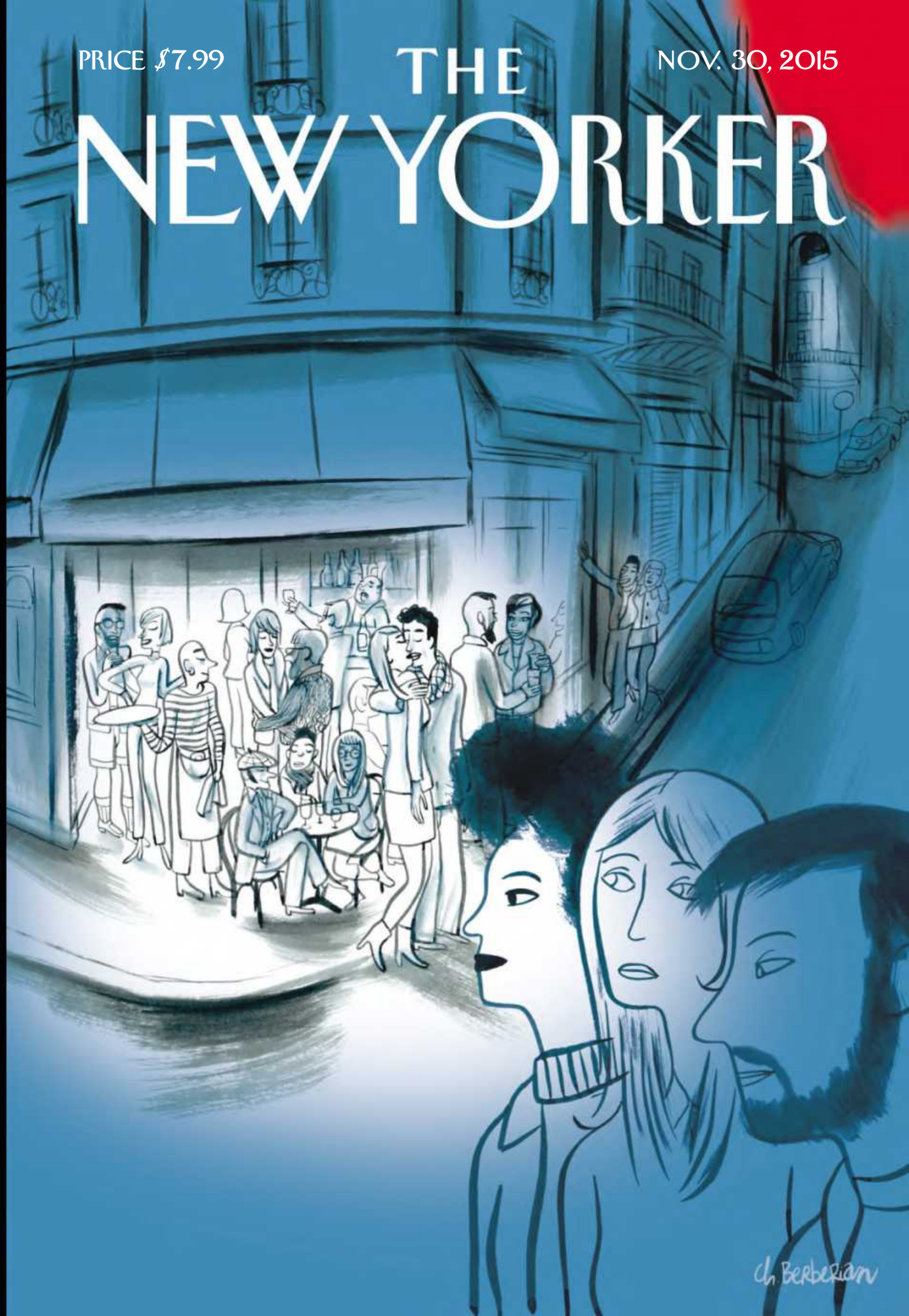


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Head of a Statue of Amenemhat III Wearing the White Crown, Twelfth Dynasty, reign of Amenemhat III (ca. 1850-1813 B.C.), Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen. Photo: Anna-Marie Keilen, The Photograph Studio, The Metropolitan Museum of Art © 2015.

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NOVEMBER 30, 2015

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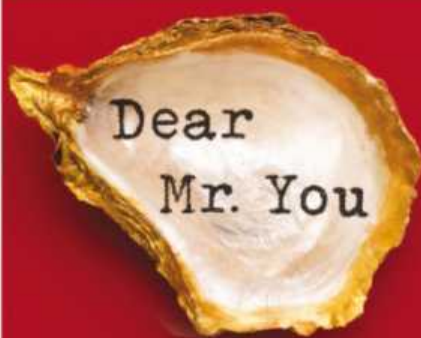
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*"Paris, November 2015"*

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**FICTION AND POETRY:** Andrea Cohen and Austin Smith read their poems, and Rachel Kushner reads her short story.

**PAGE-TURNER:** Hua Hsu writes about the cultural meanings of Chinese food, in the Food and Literature series.

**PODCASTS:** On the monthly Poetry Podcast, Meghan O'Rourke talks with Paul Muldoon, the magazine's poetry editor, about her poem "Apartment Living" and about John Ashbery's "Tapestry." Plus, on Politics and More, Dexter Filkins joins Dorothy Wickenden for a discussion about ISIS.

**VIDEO:** In the latest episode of "Comma Queen," Mary Norris talks about the difference between "insure" and "ensure."

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# THE MAIL

## DAD RIOT

*David Remnick wrote an online Cultural Comment, "Bob Dylan and the Hot Hand," about Dylan's creative streak from early 1965 to the summer of 1966. Here are some of the responses we solicited from readers:*

No one had a hot streak like Frank Loesser. Think "Guys and Dolls," "The Most Happy Fella," "Greenwillow," "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying." Also, can Cole Porter be forgotten in such a list?

*Harry Schaffner  
La Quinta, Calif.*

From 1971-74, Neil Young recorded "Harvest," "Time Fades Away," "Tonight's the Night," and "On the Beach."  
*Sean Eldon  
Ann Arbor, Mich.*

Don't disagree with your list, but am deeply concerned over an obvious omission. Good God, man: Elvis Costello!  
*Mike Cochrane  
Walnut Creek, Calif.*

It's clear that Remnick is in the tank for Dylan. "Most abundant songwriter"? Maybe. I haven't done a count. "Greatest songwriter"? Only if you are an American. If you are the rest of the Western world, it's Leonard Cohen.  
*David U'Prichard  
Philadelphia, Pa.*

Not only is the statement about Dylan by Remnick outrageous hyperbole; his list of possible examples of Dylan's betters doesn't include the true great songwriter of our generation—Paul Simon.  
*Mike Shatzkin  
New York City*

With respect to Remnick and to Dylan, I'd say that the greatest sustained burst of musical creativity in modern music is Van Morrison's streak from 1983 to 1991, when he issued, at the rate of about one a year, a string of the best rock-jazz-uncategorizable genius records ever:

"Inarticulate Speech of the Heart," "A Sense of Wonder," "No Guru, No Method, No Teacher," "Poetic Champions Compose," "Irish Heartbeat" (with the Chieftains!), "Avalon Sunset," "Enlightenment," and, finally, "Hymns to the Silence." The consistency of top-notch songs and extraordinary musicianship, for eight consecutive years—I cannot think of another songwriter who had such an amazing run of records.

*Brian Doyle  
Portland, Ore.*

John Fogerty, 1968-69  
Elton John, 1971-75  
Billy Joel, 1973-82  
*Ian D. McCargar  
Windsor, Colo.*

"Highway 61 Revisited" is a great album, but in my opinion "Blonde on Blonde" and "Blood on the Tracks" are greater. As for Dylan's being the greatest songwriter ever—hard to argue with that, though early Joni Mitchell was more poetic.

*John Gaguine  
Juneau, Alaska*

I love Dylan's songs, and for more than fifty years have admired his work, but he is not "the greatest and most abundant songwriter who has ever lived." That honor goes to Franz Schubert, a melodic genius, who composed an astonishing six hundred songs in his thirty-one years. Schubert remains among the greatest and most widely performed composers of all time.

*David E. James  
Nashville, Tenn.*

How about a shoutout for Franz Schubert?  
*Carl Abbott  
Portland, Ore.*

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to [themail@newyorker.com](mailto:themail@newyorker.com). Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.



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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



NOV/DEC 2015    WEDNESDAY 25TH    THURSDAY 26TH    FRIDAY 27TH    SATURDAY 28TH    SUNDAY 29TH    MONDAY 30TH    TUESDAY 1ST

**ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER HAS**, to great profit, devised music for phantoms, felines, Argentine icons, Norma Desmond, and Jesus Christ. Surely he can handle a few fourth graders. His new musical, "School of Rock," is based on the 2003 movie that starred Jack Black as a hard-living loser who takes over a prep-school classroom and transforms its students into an ass-kicking rock band. At the Winter Garden, where "Cats" once prowled, Alex Brightman—no relation to the composer's onetime muse Sarah Brightman—will step into the role, surrounded by a plucky ensemble of child rockers. Directed by Laurence Connor, the musical (now in previews; opening Dec. 6) has lyrics by Glenn Slater and a book by Julian Fellowes, the mastermind behind "Downton Abbey." Who said the British Invasion was over?

THE HOLIDAYS | NIGHT LIFE  
MOVIES | CLASSICAL MUSIC  
ART | THE THEATRE  
DANCE | ABOVE & BEYOND  
FOOD & DRINK

PHOTOGRAPH BY WILL MEBANE

## A horizontal strip of six stylized illustrations by Pablo Picasso. From left to right: 1. A figure in a red hat and blue body, holding a long red object. 2. A figure in a blue hat and red body, holding a long red object. 3. A figure in a red hat and blue body, holding a long red object. 4. A figure in a red hat and blue body, holding a long red object. 5. A figure in a red hat and blue body, holding a long red object. 6. A figure in a red hat and blue body, holding a long red object.





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## ROCK AND POP

*Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.*

### Tego Calderón

This Woodside room, while on the scruffier side, is worth the trek for an authentic glimpse of Latin night life, boasting a pulsing weekly program of salsa, merengue, and, on this evening, reggaetón. Calderón has long been an iconic figure in this contemporary offshoot of hip-hop, dancehall, and bomba, which started in his native Puerto Rico and has reached an international audience over the past decade. He raps almost entirely in Spanish, with an ease and minimalism that stand out against the rapid-fire density of his genre-mates. Watch for the fan favorite "Guasa Guasa," a mischievous anthem disparaging detractors as all talk—the jab stings in any tongue. Calderón's performance will likely start late, climaxing an evening of ceaseless, fevered dance: comfortable shoes are recommended. (La Boom, 56-15 Northern Blvd., Queens. 718-726-6646. Nov. 27.)

### Miley Cyrus

"Gotta hold on to your soul," Cyrus sings tenderly on this year's "Karen Don't Be Sad," "'cause they'll crush it if they can." Remember Britney Spears's "Lucky"? Cyrus most likely considers herself lucky, as the daughter of a country-star father and a born entertainer herself, across many mediums and forms. The shock and awe of her 2013 reinvention with "Bangerz" has largely subsided, and now lands the weight of maintaining the image. For every quarter-baked bout of late nights in the studio that produces a project as flailing as this summer's "Miley Cyrus & Her Dead Petz," there's the minimum six to eight weeks on the road spent supporting it, convincingly, as Cyrus will be tasked with at this early tour stop. "I don't really think she takes this stuff as seriously as everybody else does," her producer pal Mike Will Made-It recently told the *Fader*. "I think she really is just, like, an entertainer." Aren't we lucky? (Terminal 5, 610 W. 56th St. 212-582-6600. Nov. 28.)

### Elvis Depressedly

It's quite impossible to love everyone you've ever known, or to fail at everything you've ever tried. But that doesn't stop the songwriter Mat Cothran from claiming as much on his latest album, "New Alhambra." His South Carolina trio traffics in

droopy, forlorn indie ballads that toy with dark religious themes and everyday bummers as sardonically as the band's name suggests. But there's joy in there, somewhere: Cothran shares stage space with the bassist Michael Roberts and Delany Mills, his fiancée. The singer recently tweeted, "Wouldn't it be nice to never play a show again"—fans hope he'll put off retirement until after this December opener at the appropriately cozy Shea Stadium. (20 Meadow St., Brooklyn. liveatstadium.com. Dec. 1.)

### Arlo Guthrie

When "Alice's Restaurant Massacre" came out, in 1967, lasting more than eighteen minutes and taking up a full side of Arlo Guthrie's debut LP, it was a big, monumental deal. Dylan's 1966 "Visions of Johanna," though shorter, had covered a side of "Blonde on Blonde," but Iron Butterfly's "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida," a heavy-metal foray that was just as long, was still a year away. Arlo's effort was a weird hybrid, incorporating the talking blues of his father, Woody Guthrie; George Carlin's stoned comic musings; and Abbie Hoffman's Yippie politics. It captured the imagination of an era and a generation, and inspired a film by Arthur Penn. The events of the epic story-song began on Thanksgiving of 1965, in the Berkshires, and Arlo's grand tour marking fifty years since that strange day comes through Carnegie Hall. (Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. Nov. 28.)

### Lena Hall

It turns out that this Tony Award-winning actress, known for her roles in "Hedwig and the Angry Inch" and "Kinky Boots," was born into bohemia. In a brand-new musical memoir, she traces her hippie upbringing in San Francisco's landmark Haight-Ashbury neighborhood through performance, interpretive dance, and comedy bits. The multimedia experience also finds room for home videos and incense, all accompanied by a sprawling soundtrack of classical, soul, New Wave, punk rock, and more. Hall's longtime musical director and guitarist, **Watt White**, joins, as well as the keyboardist **John Deley**, the bassist **Lee Nadel**, and the drummer **Brian Fisher**. (Feinstein's/54 Below, 254 W. 54th St. 646-476-3551. Nov. 28-30 at 9:30 and Nov. 30 at 7.)

### Glen Hansard

The Irish singer-songwriter Hansard, who fronts the long-running indie-rock band the Frames, recently released a tender solo album called "Didn't He

Ramble." Hansard's soulful voice—the album's central though by no means only attraction—is smoothly textured, as if polished by high-grit sandpaper. The laid-back songs, marked by clever, spare arrangements and occasional horn blasts, conjure craggy wooded paths and foggy mornings. Opening the Brooklyn show with an acoustic set will be the sixty-six-year-old songwriter and guitarist **Richard Thompson**, whose melding of blues, Celtic folk, and rock is peerless. The following night, the melancholy chamber-pop group **August Wells** opens. (Kings Theatre, 1027 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn. Nov. 30. Beacon Theatre, 2124 Broadway, at 74th St. 212-465-6500. Dec. 1.)

### Jay Rock

When Kendrick Lamar first stormed rap circles, around 2010, he brought friends along. Lamar, Ab-Soul, Schoolboy Q, and Jay Rock form the Compton quartet known as Black Hippy, and Rock may be the roughest of the bunch. The "Hippy" title is no misnomer, hinting at the crew's often enlightened and always nuanced take on the L.A. gangbang culture they know all too intimately. But after one spin through Rock's recent Black Hippy-assisted single, "Vice City," where he riffs on speeding down the I-105 with cargo that could land him a fifteen-year sentence, you can't imagine he's much of a pacifist. (S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. 212-243-4940. Nov. 25.)

### My Morning Jacket

This band, which came out of Kentucky around the turn of the century, is one of the few rock groups that can sell out arenas, so four nights in the relatively intimate confines of the Beacon Theatre is a real gift. Since the beginning, Jim James, the leader and chief songwriter of the country-rock group, has broadened the style and the range of his compositions—making open-ended, free-floating pieces that give the quintet the opportunity to explore vistas that incorporate the symphonic and the psychedelic. At the core, though, is the power of the human voice, James's main component of connectivity. (2124 Broadway, at 74th St. 212-465-6500. Nov. 24-25 and Nov. 27-28.)

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

### Wayne Horvitz

The keyboardist and eclectically minded composer Wayne Horvitz, a former downtown music linchpin now based in Seattle, presents "Some Places Are Forever Afternoon (11 Places for Richard

Hugo)," an instrumental suite that takes inspiration from selected works by the Northwestern poet. Horvitz's handpicked octet includes the trumpeter **Ron Miles** and the Wilco guitarist **Nels Cline**. (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0363. Nov. 27.)

### Hush Point

This cool-toned ensemble, with counterpoint and contained dynamics always in mind, sets **John McNeil's** poised trumpet lines off of **Jeremy Udden's** Konitz and Desmond-tinged alto saxophone, while **Aryeh Kobrinsky** on bass and **Anthony Pinciotti** on drums purr in rhythmic equipoise. The band's recent album, "Blues and Reds," was one of the most unexpected and satisfying releases of 2014. (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. Nov. 27-28.)

### Maria Schneider Orchestra

Moving effortlessly from one acclaimed masterpiece to another, the composer, arranger, and bandleader Maria Schneider this year offered up "The Thompson Fields," a deeply lyrical and elegiac work. Expect to hear selections from the album at Schneider's annual Thanksgiving residency at Jazz Standard, as she conducts a band bursting with exceptional players, including the pianist **Frank Kimbrough** and the saxophonist **Steve Wilson**. (116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Nov. 24-29.)

### Jason Moran and the Bandwagon

The pianist Jason Moran may tip his hat to the jazz tradition—his latest album, "All Rise," was a shape-shifting tribute to Fats Waller—but he generally stays focussed on the music's genre-inclusive future. The Bandwagon trio, with the bassist Tarus Mateen and the drummer Nasheet Waits, can favor rhythmic interaction at the expense of reflection, but the group's fervor is hard to deny or resist. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Nov. 24-29.)

### Daryl Sherman Trio

A witty and knowing singer and a sure pianist who has been honing her art since the early seventies, Sherman looks to mostly forgotten giants such as Mildred Bailey to shape her understated but eminently swinging style. She has an authenticity and a confidence that come with experience, allowing her to regularly investigate nooks and crannies of the standard repertoire which are typically left unexplored. (Jazz at Kitano, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. Nov. 25.)



# MOVIES



## OPENING CREED

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 25. (In wide release.)

## THE DANISH GIRL

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In limited release.)

## JANIS: LITTLE GIRL BLUE

A documentary about Janis Joplin, directed by Amy Berg. (In limited release.)

## KILLING THEM SAFELY

A documentary by Nick Berardini, about deaths resulting from the use of Tasers by the police. (In limited release.)

## VECTOR FRANKENSTEIN

A variation on Mary Shelley's theme, told from the perspective of Igor, the doctor's assistant (Daniel Radcliffe). Directed by Paul McGuigan; co-starring James McAvoy and Jessica Brown Findlay. (In wide release.)

## REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

*Titles in bold are reviewed.*

## BAM CINÉMATEK

"Turkeys for Thanksgiving." Nov. 26 at 2 and Nov. 27 at 7: "Cleopatra." • Nov. 26 at 7 and Nov. 27 at 2:30: "Heaven's Gate" (1980, Michael Cimino). • Nov. 29 at 5 and 7:30: "One from the Heart" (1981, Francis Ford Coppola).

## FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"Todd Haynes: The Other Side of Dreams." Nov. 25 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Fox and His Friends." • Nov. 27 at 2 and Nov. 29 at 6:30: "Far from Heaven" (2002, Haynes). The Nov. 29 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the cinematographer, Ed Lachman.



## MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Michael Cimino's "Heaven's Gate," from 1980, in our digital edition and online.

## NOW PLAYING

### By the Sea

Romantic doom hangs heavy in the sun-streaked, blue-tinged air of the French Mediterranean coastline in this erotic melodrama, set in the early nineteen-seventies, written and directed by Angelina Jolie Pitt. She and Brad Pitt play the married couple Vanessa and Roland Bertrand, troubled New York artists. An acclaimed dancer, Vanessa retired owing to age, and now spends her time berating Roland, a celebrated but blocked writer, for the sake of whose inspiration they take a seaside hotel room in France for the summer. There, they become obsessed with a newlywed couple, Lea and François (Mélanie Laurent and Melvil Poupaud), whom they drag into their reckless sexual games. Working with the cinematographer Christian Berger, Jolie Pitt frames the actors in locked-down, off-balance images that evoke wide-eyed terror at the movie's voracious cruelty as well as pride in its confessional agonies. Jolie Pitt makes a more daring and successful effort at visual invention than do many more celebrated filmmakers, and she ventures with an admirable boldness into mysterious and alluring psychological territory. —Richard Brody (In wide release.)

### Carol

One day in the nineteen-fifties, Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett), a wife and mother, is shopping for Christmas presents at a department store in Manhattan. She comes across a salesgirl, Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), and they fall in love, right there. (How long has it been, you ask yourself, since a movie delivered a proper *coup de foudre*?) Todd Haynes's film then follows the two of them as they meet for lunch, hang out at Carol's home, embark on an aimless journey, and go to bed—conscious, all the while, of what they are risking, flouting, or leaving behind. Therese has a boyfriend (Jake Lacy), and Carol has a husband (Kyle Chandler) and a child, although the maternal instinct gets short dramatic shrift. That feels true to Patricia Highsmith, whose 1952 novel, "The Price of Salt," is the foundation of the film. The fine screenplay is by Phyllis Nagy, who drains away the sourness of the book; what remains is a production of clean and frictionless beauty, down to the last, strokable inch of clothing and skin. Yet Haynes and his stars, for

all their stylish restraint, know that elegance alone will not suffice. Inside the showcase is a storm of feeling. With Sarah Paulson, as Carol's best friend. —Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 11/23/15.) (In limited release.)

### Cleopatra

Joseph L. Mankiewicz's colossal four-hour-long spectacle, from 1963, is a personal artistic project of the highest order. It's also a heartbreaking melodrama that runs on the real-life chemistry between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Mankiewicz presents the queen as a self-possessed political strategist and a literal diva who claims to be the goddess Isis and enjoys every minute of her veneration. Taylor plays the role with an uninhibited imperiousness, as when she turns Cleopatra's entrance into Rome, aboard a giant rolling sphinx, into the ultimate red-carpet photo op. Mankiewicz—who directed the 1953 "Julius Caesar"—here offers a brilliantly ironic revision of Shakespeare, showing Burton, as Antony, only mouthing the famous funeral oration, drowned out by a crowd that won't lend him their ears. The director's analytical intellectualism—with an emphasis on the diplomatic maneuvers of empire-building, the tactical complexity of ancient warfare, and the psychological pressure of romance on the levers of power—is heated by the erotic passion of Antony and Cleopatra and the intense bond between Taylor and Burton, which is as entrancing in the movie's drama as it was in life. —R.B. (BAM Cinémathèque; Nov. 26-27.)

### Creed

This stirring, heartfelt, rough-grained reboot of the series is the brainchild of Ryan Coogler ("Fruitvale Station"), who directed, wrote the story, and co-wrote the script with Aaron Covington. It starts in a juvenile-detention center in Los Angeles, where young Adonis Johnson is confined. He's soon adopted by Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad), Apollo's widow, who informs him that the boxer (who died before Adonis's birth) was his father. As an adult, Adonis (played by Michael B. Jordan) defies Mary Anne to pursue his own boxing career, moving to Philadelphia to be trained by Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), his father's rival. The burly backstory and weight of personal history don't stall the drama but provide its fuel. Coogler—aided by the cinematographer Maryse Alberti's urgent long takes—links the physical sacrifices of boxing and acting alike and binds Adonis's martial passion to his family feeling. (The focussed heat of Jordan's commitment meshes well with Stallone's wry, haunted serenity.) Adonis also finds sweet and mature romance with the rising singer Bianca (played with febrile passion by Tessa Thompson), who

has physical struggles of her own. Coogler ingeniously stands the myth of bootstrap-tugging exertions on its head: without family and connections, the new star of the boxing ring wouldn't stand a fighting chance. With Tony Bellew, as the champion whom Adonis challenges. —R.B. (In wide release.)

### Fox and His Friends

At the start of this 1975 drama, Franz Biberkopf—Fox, to his friends—loses his job as a carnival-sideshow performer but wins half a million marks in the lottery. Soon thereafter, Fox also wins a new boyfriend: Eugen Thiess (Peter Chatel), the heir to a small printing firm, whose comforts are threatened by the company's impending bankruptcy. A gay man who's half a hustler, Fox—played by the film's director, Rainer Werner Fassbinder—is a fool for love, and he's soon parted from his money. Fox makes loans to keep the company afloat and pays for Eugen's luxuries, but the Thiess family subjects Fox's table manners, speech, wardrobe, and culture to cruel scrutiny. This melodramatic fable of emotional extremes is sharp and precise—nowhere more than in Fassbinder's attention to the price of domestic finery and industrial necessities. Munich's hothouse demimonde plays like a permanent floating theatre that displays unspoken distinctions of class and status. Here, good taste happens to bad people and masks the predatory wiles of business and love alike. In German. —R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Nov. 25.)

### The Hunger Games: Mockingjay—Part 2

The test of a good franchise is that you should be able to walk in off the street, knowing nothing of the films that came before, and still enjoy the show. Sadly, any novice who submits to this final dose of "The Hunger Games," directed by Francis Lawrence, will be seized with bafflement. One clear fact to emerge is that Panem, which is a place rather than, as its name suggests, a fibre supplement, is at the peak of civil strife. Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), the Mockingjay of the title, joins a rebel band that mounts an assault upon the Capitol, in a bid to end the nefarious reign of President Snow (Donald Sutherland). Not until halfway into the movie, after many maudering conversations, do the thrills kick in, with the writhing onset of cannibalistic mutants, who have clearly been kept waiting long enough. The special effects are oddly lax (a gush of black oil looks anything but wet), although the last scene of all should, without meaning to, draw gales of grateful laughter. From the crowded cast (Liam Hemsworth, Julianne Moore, Josh Hutcherson, Woody Harrelson, and the late Philip Seymour Hoffman), only Sutherland emerges enhanced, his

wry grin proving that he, at least, has seen the joke all along.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

### Legend

Two helpings of Tom Hardy in a single film. He plays both Reggie and Ronald Kray, the sharp-suited, quick-fisted twins who—so the story goes—held sway over much of London in the nineteen-sixties. Though their tale has been told before, Brian Helgeland's movie, from its title onward, continues to revel in their thuggery, as well as in their predilection for crossing the social divide. (At their West End night club, lowlifes mingled with the well bred; each side felt flattered by the other, and by their shared contempt for the middle class. What a country.) Hardy is in bruising form, and his double turn is as adroit as you would expect, featuring a different gait and snarl for each twin. But the movie lacks a plot and a sense of purpose. We are led, at a solid pace, through the wavering fortunes of the Krays, the thwarted progress of the policeman (Christopher Eccleston) who pursued them, and the sorry thoughts of Frances (Emily Browning), the local girl who had the bad luck to marry Reggie. With Chazz Palminteri (of course) as an emissary from Meyer Lansky. Now *there* was a gangster.—*A.L.* (In limited release.)

### The Night Before

Seth Rogen bursts with inventive exuberance in this schematic but genial holiday comedy about millennials settling down. He plays Isaac Greenberg, a lawyer, husband, and soon-to-be father, who spends Christmas Eve with his two best friends—Chris (Anthony Mackie), a pro football player, and Ethan (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a failing musician—in search of a famous clandestine party that has been their decade-long obsession. Isaac's wife, Betsy (Jillian Bell), sends him off with a special present (a compact cornucopia of drugs) that gives rise to a wild range of outlandish visions and adventures. Each man has his trouble—Ethan tries to reconnect with his ex-girlfriend, Diana (Lizzy Caplan), and Chris tries to score marijuana for his team's quarterback (Aaron Hill) while savoring his fame with a new fan (Ilana Glazer). The movie's sketch-like set pieces blend erotic whimsy and pop-culture voracity; the cleverly deployed supporting cast, including Mindy Kaling, Miley Cyrus, Michael Shannon, and Tracy Morgan, serves a stiff Zeitgeist cocktail. But the best and biggest gags involve stoners and boners, Jewish Catskills-style shtick and Christian festivities. Directed by Jonathan Levine.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

### So's Your Old Man

The W. C. Fields persona—cantankerous, bibulous, insolent, henpecked—is on riotous display in this 1926 silent comedy, directed by Gregory La Cava. Fields plays Samuel Bisbee, a small-town inventor whose workshop is also his private speakeasy. His get-rich-quick schemes have left his family poor, and his wife (Marcia Harris) doesn't let him forget it. The couple's grown daughter (Kittens Reichert) is being courted by the town's wealthiest young man, whose mother (Julia Ralph) looks down her nose at the Bisbees. But Sam expects his new invention—a shatterproof windshield—to make his name and fortune. Fields delivers his full repertory of grimaces and double takes, stumbles and eruptions, and La Cava leavens the comedy with enough drama to make it sting. The compact action is rich in texture; a long, loopy sequence on a train seems filmed in actual motion, and a surprise encounter with a Spanish princess (Alice Joyce) highlights the sad fantasy of a real-life



Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor star in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's "Cleopatra," from 1963.

Bisbee's chances amid the slim prospects and narrow morals of small-town life.—*R.B.* (Museum of the Moving Image; Nov. 29.)

### Spectre

The James Bond franchise, which briefly felt, in "Skyfall," as though it might be reaching some kind of conclusion, is revived anew. This time, there is trouble back at the base. 007 (Daniel Craig), M (Ralph Fiennes), Q (Ben Whishaw, in resplendent knitwear), and Moneypenny (Naomie Harris) find themselves beleaguered, as a reptilian chief of intelligence (Andrew Scott) threatens to limit the scope of MI6 and, in the process, to cramp Bond's style. Our hero, needless to say, is undeterred. He embarks on a spree, taking in Mexico City, Rome, an Austrian peak, and the Algerian desert, before returning to London for a somewhat gloomy finale, which even includes (for devotees of "Goldfinger") a bomb with an old-fashioned countdown. His lovers are played by Léa Seydoux and, much too fleetingly, Monica Bellucci; his opposite number in combat is Mr. Hinx (Dave Bautista); and the goal of Bond's exploring turns out to be Oberhauser (Christoph Waltz), the latest—and, we are assured, the most lethal—of his countless nemeses. The movie, directed by Sam Mendes, is long and lavish, and Craig continues to look bruised and hostile in his tightly buttoned suits. For every viewer who revels in the breathless action, however,

there may be others who find it pointless—all that momentum, heading nowhere in particular. Bond's license to kill is a reason for staying alive, but is it enough?—*A.L.* (11/16/15) (In wide release.)

### Spotlight

There are many ways in which the new Tom McCarthy film could have gone wrong. The subject could hardly be thornier: the uncovering, by an investigative team at the Boston *Globe*, of widespread sexual abuse by Catholic priests. The victims were children, but we meet them as adults, when they tell their stories. The movie, scripted by McCarthy and Josh Singer, resists any temptation to reconstruct the original crimes, and the sole focus is on the progress of the journalistic task. The result is restrained but never dull, and, barring a couple of overheated moments, when a character shouts in closeup, we don't feel harried or hectored. The film becomes a study in togetherness, both bad and fruitful; on the one hand, we get the creepy sense of a community closing ranks, while on the other there is the old-school pleasure of watching an ensemble in full spate. The reporters are played by Michael Keaton, Brian d'Arcy James, Mark Ruffalo, and Rachel McAdams; their superiors, by John Slattery and Liev Schreiber; and the lawyers, by Billy Crudup and Stanley Tucci, who, as usual, calmly pockets every scene in which he appears.—*A.L.* (11/9/15) (In limited release.)



# CLASSICAL MUSIC

## OPERA

### Metropolitan Opera

John Dexter's legendary production of Berg's "*Lulu*," from 1977, allowed two generations of performers to give full range both to the work's compositional complexity and to the boundless passions that bring it to life. In a boldly original turnabout, the acclaimed South African artist and director William Kentridge has reimagined the piece as a crystal-line chamber drama in which the visual décor—a carefully measured flow of black-and-white images inspired by Expressionist woodcuts and Weimar cinema—serves to frame and constrain the opera's emotive power: instead of seducing the audience, *Lulu*, the ultimate femme fatale, becomes subject to its "gaze." The alluring Marlis Petersen, bringing her pinpoint coloratura to the title role, embraces the concept, etching her part as if on glass; as her husband and nemesis, Dr. Schön, Johan Reuter offers a more full-blooded interpretation. Susan Graham lavishes vocal splendor onto the role of Countess Geschwitz; Daniel Brenna is a puppyish but vocally hearty Alwa. Derrick Inouye, a Met stalwart, is in the pit. (Nov. 28 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** The austere but enduring Luc Bondy production of "*Tosca*," the most impassioned of Puccini's melodramas, rounds out its autumn run with a new cast featuring Liudmyla Monastyrskya, Roberto Aronica, and Marco Vratogna in the leading roles; Joseph Colaneri conducts. (Nov. 25 and Dec. 1 at 7:30 and Nov. 28 at 12:30. These are the final performances of the season.) • A cynic might decry the Met's predictable programming of "*La Bohème*" during yet another holiday season, but Franco Zeffirelli's masterly production of Puccini's midwinter tragedy, now deep into its fourth decade, continues to cast an irresistible spell. The conductor Paolo Carignani leads a first-rate cast, including Ramón Vargas, Barbara Frittoli, Ana María Martínez, and, in his company debut, Levente Molnár. (Nov. 27 at 8 and Nov. 30 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

### Opera Lafayette: "Catone in Utica"

With its uninterrupted sequence of da-capo arias, Vivaldi's opera about the senator who defied Caesar packs in plenty of opportunities for brilliant coloratura singing, though without the dramatic innovations that Handel brought to this kind of music. Still, Opera Lafayette has reassembled much of the cast that made the opera a success at Glimmerglass Festival this past summer, with Thomas Michael Allen as Catone and the often dazzling young countertenor John Holiday as Cesare. The company's artistic director, Ryan Brown, conducts a semi-staged adaptation of Tazewell Thompson's Glimmerglass production. (Gerald Lynch Theatre, John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 59th St. operalafayette.com. Dec. 1 at 8.)

## Vertical Player Repertory: "Jewels of the Baroque"

Known for feats of site-specific operatic derring-do, this intrepid group combines forces with Opera Feroce in one of the company's intimate "Miniatures Behind the Door" presentations—an afternoon of "high voices and low tea," staged in period costume. The tantalizing concept: a group of musicians and players straight out of the High Baroque are hired to entertain a wealthy but not exactly aristocratic family in what promises to be a hysterically tense and uncomfortably close-quartered salon experience. Hilarity—delivered with music by Monteverdi, Telemann, Handel, Rameau, and C. P. E. Bach, with a dash of Mozart—ensues. Fancy dress is encouraged. (Behind the Door, 219 Court St., Brooklyn. vpropera.org. Nov. 28 at 4 and Nov. 29 at 2.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

### New York Philharmonic

"Rachmaninoff: A Philharmonic Festival" is a three-week series devoted to the music of Russia's last great Romantic composer (who died an American citizen), an effort that would be inconceivable without a superlative exponent of the composer's instrument on hand—in this case, Daniil Trifonov, unquestionably the finest young pianist to come out of Russia in recent years. Ludovic Morlot, the dynamic conductor of the Seattle Symphony, joins Trifonov in the final program, an evening featuring the titanic Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor as well as the composer's final work, the enticing and mercurial Symphonic Dances. (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656. Nov. 24 at 7:30

and Nov. 27-28 at 8. Note: The Saturday-matinée concert, on Nov. 28 at 2, replaces the Concerto with a slate of light works—by Glinka, Bernstein, and others—performed by members of the orchestra's renowned brass section.)

## RECITALS

### Music at the Frick Collection:

#### Philippe Cassard and Cédric Pescia


The Frick's elegant, gold-lined music room, the scene of many a New York début, performs the same *rôle* for this French piano duo, who will play beloved four-hand works by Mozart, Debussy ("Épigraphes Antiques"), Brahms, and Schubert (the *Fantasie in F Minor*). (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715. Nov. 29 at 5.)

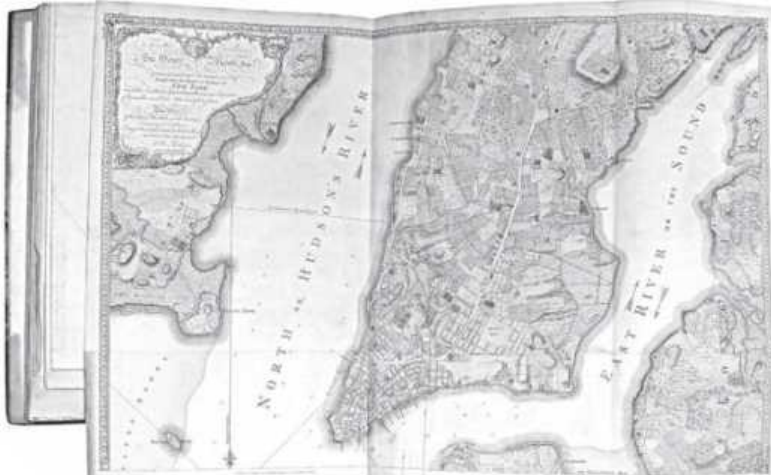
### Ensemble ACJW

Carnegie Hall's official presentations thin out during Thanksgiving week, of course, but the organization's sharp team of young music professionals is happy to fill the breach. Its members offer performances of works by Mozart (the Quartet in F Major for Oboe and Strings), Schumann, and Mendelssohn (the String Quintet No. 2 in B-Flat Major) at Weill Recital Hall. (212-247-7800. Dec. 1 at 7:30.)

### Bargemusic: Lincoln Trio

The outstanding Chicago-based piano trio headlines at the floating chamber-music series this week, presenting music by Haydn, Turina, Brahms (the grandly Beethovenian Trio No. 2 in C Major), and Jennifer Higdon. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. Nov. 28 at 8 and Nov. 29 at 4. For tickets and full schedule, see bargemusic.org.)





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A still from Rachel Rose's video "Everything and More," which includes footage shot at a space-station laboratory.

## SEEING STARS

*A young New Yorker brings her space odyssey to the Whitney.*

IT'S STILL EARLY for best-of-year list making, but best début of 2015 is a lock: Rachel Rose's transfixing video "Everything and More," conceived for the Whitney at the invitation of the sharp curator Christopher Y. Lew. The nonnarrative collage, on view through Feb. 7, combines footage that Rose shot of a space-station research facility, of a vast crowd at an E.D.M. concert, and, in her studio, of low-tech galactic abstractions. (Imagine a drifting Milky Way that involves real milk.) The soundtrack sifts together wordless vocals by Aretha Franklin (extracted from "Amazing Grace") and a recording of the American astronaut David Wolf, talking to Rose on the phone about the pleasures and perils of space. The result is an ecstatic epic about gravities, literal and figurative, which unfolds onscreen for eleven minutes and orbits in the mind's eye for days. When Wolf describes earth as "a jewel floating in blackness," it's as if he were describing Rose's piece itself.

I entered the show as a skeptic. The art world is a flavor-of-the-month club, and the twenty-eight-year-old artist, who has an M.F.A. from Columbia and a studio on the Lower East Side, arrives at the Whitney ensconced in consensus: features in the *Times* and *Artforum*, prizes from art fairs (Frieze and Artissima), the support of the inescapable tastemaker Hans Ulrich Obrist. But, as was the case a few years ago with another young video artist, Ryan Trecartin, Rose's talent outpaces the hype.

There is no doubt that Rose is ambitious, and "Everything and More" has affinities with the work of another filmmaking artist, Sarah Morris, whose true medium is access to power, whether she's inside the White House or behind the scenes at the Oscars. But Rose's work is more soulful and more audacious, as she slips between the hyperreal and the hypnagogic, using an arsenal of effects, from high-tech to D.I.Y.

Rose pulls off one special effect at the Whitney that's remarkable in its simplicity. The "black box" gallery where the video is installed is not what it seems. Instead of four walls, it has three and a window; the glass is sheathed in scrim. At unpredictable intervals, natural light casts silhouettes of the view on the museum's terrace outside the window—notably, of a sculpture of a dark star by Frank Stella—onto the screen, collapsing dimensions and fusing inner and outer space.

—Andrea K. Scott

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

### Bronx Museum

#### "Martin Wong: Human Instamatic"

Like a firecracker with a very long fuse, the reputation of the Chinese-American painter and bohemian's bohemian Martin Wong has sizzled inconspicuously since before his death, in 1999, from AIDS-related causes, at the age of fifty-three. It should now go bang, thanks to this terrific retrospective, crisply curated by Antonio Sergio Bessa and Yasmin Ramirez, which includes brick-by-brick slum cityscapes; witty messages in sign language, rendered by fat fingers that emerge from cufflinked white cuffs; gnomonic symbolologies of star constellations and eight balls; erotic fantasies of hunky firemen and seraphic prison inmates; and celebrations of the artist's close friend Miguel Piñero, the late poet, activist, erstwhile armed robber, and gifted author. All are drawn or painted in a commanding style that bridges exacting realism and poetic vision. The best pictures lock your gaze and take your mind for a fine ride. Through Feb. 14.

### Frick Collection

#### "Andrea del Sarto: The Renaissance Workshop in Action"

The first major American exhibition of del Sarto, an art-historical hinge between the High Renaissance and Mannerism, is an intimate affair, favoring drawings made by the artist's own hand over the paintings that rolled out of his workshop. Andrea (dismissed as timid by his student Vasari but exalted, three centuries later, in a poem by Robert Browning) favored red chalk, and was not afraid to apply it heavily—his "Madonna and Child with Saint John" (1516–17), on loan from the Uffizi, is as scarlet as a slaughterhouse floor. Most of the drawings here were preparatory studies, and while many are compelling in their own right (a delicate baby Jesus with a wispy forelock; a sensitive portrait of a purse-lipped woman, perhaps his wife), others are, at best, procedural (figure studies featuring his studio assistants in the altogether). Three paintings, however, make a forceful case for renewed interest in the artist, notably the so-called Medici Holy Family, from 1529, in which Christ, Mary, St. Elizabeth, and John the Baptist conjoin into an architectonic diamond quartet. Through Jan. 10.

### Jewish Museum

#### "Unorthodox"

Fifty-five international artists embrace nonconformity; few are familiar names. In some cases, their mediums have been overlooked by the mainstream, like the octogenarian Colombian fibre artist Olga de Amaral and her Indian counterpart Mrinalini



Mukherjee, who died this year, at the age of sixty-five. Others are self-taught, including Miroslav Tichý, who took thousands of pictures of unsuspecting women in Czechoslovakia, using a camera he fashioned from cardboard and cans. Many more, though, simply believe that art has no higher purpose than self-expression—or, some might say, self-indulgence—such as the tiresome Austé, who paints catlike nymphs amid starbursts and polka dots. Through March 27.

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

### Peter Doig

The harder you look, the better it gets. Doig's challenging mishmashes of gawky images—including nudes, spearfishers, and equestrians, in this superb show—and painterly improvisation play a mental toggle between seeing and thinking. In one picture, a dishevelled lion stalks in front of a yellow building with hard-edged green doors. What's going on? Something that entails a ghostly figure and a faraway lighthouse. Surrealism? No. Prodigies of color and brushwork contest rather than bolster the hints of story. Nothing resolves. Everything works. The payoff is like finding yourself very pleasantly high in the air, with no idea how you got there. Through Jan. 16. (Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623.)

### Jungjin Lee

Lee, who grew up in Seoul and lives in New York, was one of twelve photographers invited to Israel and the West Bank, between 2009 and 2012, to record their impressions for the project "This Place." (Other participants included Stephen Shore, Rosalind Fox Solomon, and Thomas Struth.) Lee's panoramic landscapes are particularly sombre. Although shadowed by the current conflict and anxiety of the region, the creamy black-and-white pictures suggest nineteenth-century views with the picturesque stripped away. Orderly rows of date palms appear under a blasted, blank sky, and all roads look like dead ends. Through Dec. 12. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

## GALLERIES—CHELSEA

### Ilit Azoulay

There is only one picture in this exhibition—a ruined cityscape that morphs into a cabinet of curiosities. Thirty-six feet long and packed with historical allusions, the digitally composed collage was made by the Israeli photographer during a residency in Berlin. A deconstructed version of the same piece is now installed at MOMA, in "Ocean of Images," where eighty-five elements—a defaced memorial plaque, a shrunken head, a wax-candle skull—are scattered like so many jigsaw-puzzle pieces.

Here, the same imagery coheres into a cinematic epic in which destruction vies with renewal. Through Dec. 19. (Meislin, 534 W. 24th St. 212-627-2552.)

### Mark Bradford

Robust, very large abstract painting-collages and impressive video projections enhance this Los Angeles phenom's already mighty reputation as the visual bard of an African-American, gay, elegiac sensibility. The paper-encrusted pictures, heavily worked in symbolic blacks and pinks, command attention with peculiarly matter-of-fact gravitas. One panoramic projection memorializes bygone high times of the seventies: roller-skate wheels whiz or bounce by or collide or come to rest along a concrete floor, to a disco-funk soundtrack. In another video, the image is blank except for subtitles, which repeat the soundtrack you hear: the standup routine of a black transgender comic who jokes profanely—and, shockingly, rather hilariously—about AIDS. Through Dec. 23. (Hauser & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-794-4970.)

### Saloua Raouda Choucair

The Lebanese modernist has her first gallery show in the U.S. a year shy of her hundredth birthday. Choucair studied with Léger in Paris before returning to Beirut in 1951, and her paintings, sculptures, and decorative objects effortlessly interlock European abstraction with the heritage of Islamic arts. Rhythmic, high-spirited compositions of colored ellipses and crescents jump from vivid gouaches to wall hangings and rugs. In three dimensions, Choucair tends toward modular stacks of terra cotta or stone. Some, like a 1973 model for public housing, could fit in your hand; three much larger stone totems invite favorable comparisons with Brancusi. Through Dec. 20. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

### Camille Henrot

Pick up one of the eight wall-mounted phones in this whip-smart, young French artist's show and a customer-service agent will offer a bewildering array of options. A dog-training hot line begins simply enough ("Press 2 if he chews up your shoes") but quickly gets weird ("If he uses your child's Social Security number to claim an income-tax refund without your permission, press 11"). Seek tech support for your computer and receive advice about your father, who may in fact be Agamemnon—"Has he attempted to murder you or your siblings in order to change weather patterns?" Large watercolors, a cross between Antonin Artaud and Saul Steinberg, perpetuate the comic anxiety. Through Dec. 12. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

### Sheila Hicks

The veteran fibre artist is on a roll, deploying her yarns, threads, cords, and weavings across a range of conventions from painting and collage to sculpture. Anything a vertical-stripe painting can do, a yarn array can do better. (No color is more plangent than dyed color, and the fuzziness of the material lends subtle pizzazz.) Clumps of indigo-saturated thread simply smushed under glass more than sate an appetite for graphic beauty. A ceiling-hung cascade of bundled and braided strands in soft colors combines monumental presence and please-touch allure. Through Nov. 28. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

### Jeff Koons

Just in time for Christmas shopping comes a new line of Koons wall candy: mirrored, blue "gazing balls," displayed on shelves affixed to handmade copies of classic paintings. There's the "Mona Lisa," of course, Géricault's "The Raft of the Medusa," predictably, and, sure enough, Manet's "Olympia," among other Art History 101 chestnuts by Titian, Rubens, Rembrandt, Courbet, van Gogh, Picasso, et al. The meticulous faking, which extends to the craquelure, makes for fast fun and a cumulative stupor. The work's pointlessness may be its cachet: insolent big nothings to jollify folks who are tired of having everything. Through Dec. 23. (Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717.)

### Alina Szapocznikow

One of the greatest rediscoveries of postwar art from behind the Iron Curtain is the fragile, surreal sculpture of this Polish artist, which rivals that of Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse. (There was a retrospective at MOMA, in 2013.) Szapocznikow, who was interned in Auschwitz as a teen-ager, made casts of lips and breasts (often her own) in resin or polyurethane, which she affixed to a plaster nude, fashioned into light fixtures, or drowned in a black puddle of foam. The toxic materials she worked with endangered her health; Szapocznikow died of cancer, at the age of forty-seven, in 1972. The illness haunts her abject late works, such as a male nude propped against the wall, as gaunt and sallow as Holbein's dead Christ. Through Dec. 5. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

### Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen

Even skeptics of the couple's monumental public art will be disarmed by this irresistible cornucopia—more being more—of models, little sculptures, reliefs, drawings, and whatnot bagatelles, ranging from Oldenburg's solo years in the sixties and early seventies through the three decades

of the pair's collaborations, which lasted until van Bruggen's death, in 2009. Their titles alone convey fancy; consider "Study for a Sculpture in the Form of an Unhitched Wagon Loaded with Goods, with Tambourine Wheels." The title of the show is "Things Around the House"—every house should be so lucky. Through Dec. 12. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

### Rachel Whiteread

For more than two decades, the British artist has been casting the negative spaces of furniture and architectural elements—the space underneath chairs and beds; the interior of a whole house. Among the new pieces here are concrete casts of undistinguished brick walls, overlaid with resin molds of windows (the panes become positive and the mullions negative, when translated into olive polymer). There's nothing wrong with a focussed approach, but it's refreshing to see Whiteread get out of her comfort zone, as she does in three freehand drawings of hexagonal patterns, whose splotches and blots offer a welcome jolt. Through Dec. 19. (Luhning Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

### Glen Fogel

One of the two lovers in the 2011 British melodrama "Weekend" is an artist named Glen, a character possibly inspired by Fogel, who once had a romance with the movie's director. Here, the artist appropriates the film's soundtrack and adds purple lighting, as if in a night club. Ten "Man Quilts," which bear a faint resemblance to Ad Reinhardt's Black Paintings, are made out of clothing from the men in Fogel's life. A gesture that might once have seemed transgressive comes off as little more than sentimental. Through Jan. 17. (JTT, 170A Suffolk St. 212-574-8152.)

### Katy Grannan

With three brief videos and several stills derived from Grannan's upcoming feature-length film, the Berkeley-based photographer creates a loose, cinematic framework for a terrific series of color portraits. The setting is a desolate swath of California's Central Valley occupied by drifters and loners, women and men with strong, weathered faces and thousand-yard stares. In black-and-white pictures, some wade into a river or wander down streets with a drowsy aimlessness that recurs in the film stills, each no more than a fragment: wet hair, open mouth, pink panties. In one video, a dazed young woman eating a Popsicle glazes over in between bites, looking too lost to focus or care. Through Dec. 20. (Salon 94 Bowery, 243 Bowery, at Stanton St. 212-979-0001.)

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## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

### The Color Purple

Jennifer Hudson, Cynthia Erivo, and Danielle Brooks star in a revival of the 2005 musical, based on Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and directed by John Doyle. In previews. (Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Fiddler on the Roof

Danny Burstein plays Tevye, the shtetl patriarch, in Bartlett Sher's revival of the 1964 musical, based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem. In previews. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

### Gigantic

Vineyard Theatre presents a new musical by Matthew roi Berger, Randy Blair, and Tim Drucker, about a boy who goes to weight-loss camp in Pennsylvania. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

### H2O

In Jane Martin's play, directed by West Hyler, a movie star cast in a Broadway production of "Hamlet" goes looking for his Ophelia. Previews begin Nov. 27. Opens Dec. 1. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

### Invisible Thread

Diane Paulus directs Matt Gould and Griffin Matthews's musical, in which a young New Yorker volunteers in Uganda. In previews. (Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

### Lazarus

Ivo van Hove directs a new musical by David Bowie and Enda Walsh, inspired by "The Man Who Fell to Earth" and starring Michael C. Hall, Cristin Milioti, and Michael Esper. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-460-5475.)

### Marjorie Prime

In Jordan Harrison's play, directed by Anne Kauffman and set in the near future, an elderly woman uses artificial intelligence to review her life story. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

## New York Animals

Bedlam presents a new play by Steven Sater ("Spring Awakening"), featuring songs by Sater and Burt Bacharach, in which four actors play twenty-one New Yorkers on a rainy day. In previews. Opens Nov. 29. (New Ohio, 154 Christopher St. 866-811-4111.)

## Oh, Hello On (Off) Broadway

The comedians Nick Kroll and John Mulaney revive their characters Gil Faizon and George St. Geegland, two Upper West Siders known for their fictitious prank show "Too Much Tuna." Previews begin Dec. 1. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

## Once Upon a Mattress

Jackie Hoffman and John (Lypsinka) Epperson star in the Mary Rodgers musical about the princess and the pea, revived by Transport Group and directed by Jack Cummings III. In previews. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

## These Paper Bullets!

Billie Joe Armstrong and Rolin Jones wrote this musical adaptation of "Much Ado About Nothing," reset in Beatles-era London and directed by Jackson Gay. In previews. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

## NOW PLAYING

### Dames at Sea

First produced in 1966 at the legendary Caffè Cino, starring a teen-age Bernadette Peters, this delightful musical was born out of George Haimsohn, Robin Miller, and Jim Wise's affection for all those nineteen-thirties singing-and-dancing shows, featuring a wide-eyed Joan Blondell or Ruby Keeler tapping her way to the top. This revival, directed with love by Randy Skinner, is so fresh that it feels as if it all just materialized for you. Eloise Kropp plays the starstruck Ruby, who arrives in Depression-era New York with nothing but her tap shoes and a dream. She meets and falls for Dick (Cary Tedder) and wins a place in a chorus line. There she

must contend with the temperamental Mona (Lesli Margherita), who, of course, suffers a sudden illness that gives Ruby her first big break—on a Navy ship. Oh, right, and all of this happens in a day. The actors all get it right, and there's a fun, intimate vibe to the proceedings, along with very gay hilarity. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

## Eclipsed

Although Danai Gurira's harrowing play—about the brutalization of women during the moral vacuum of Liberia's second civil war—has its own stark rewards, the main draw of Liesl Tommy's production is the high-intensity wattage radiated by its star, Lupita Nyong'o, who is making her New York theatre debut after winning an Oscar, last year, for "12 Years a Slave." Before she was a Hollywood darling, Nyong'o was a classically trained stage actor, and she renders a haunting turn as the Girl, a victim of serial horrors who, amid the spiralling chaos of the conflict, picks up a gun and becomes a victimizer herself, rounding up other young women for the rebels' rape camps. Furiously committed, Nyong'o pays the material the ultimate compliment a celebrity actor can bestow on a playwright—by submerging her iconicity, and disappearing into her role. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through Nov. 29.)

## Incident at Vichy

Arthur Miller saw the world in a grid: good was good, bad was bad, and the gray areas of existence were either unexplored in his work or handled clumsily. This weakness is especially clear in Signature Theatre Company's revival of his 1964 drama, directed by Michael Wilson. The play opens in Vichy, France, in 1942, in a detention center, where the Gestapo are looking for collaborators who are willing to betray Jews, liberals, and other undesirables. One by one, the detainees are led off to a room, where they're either extinguished or given papers that allow them to live "freely" in a world where there is no freedom. Into this dire



situation walks Von Berg (sincerely played by Richard Thomas). An Austrian prince, he is granted immunity by the Nazi officers, but what can his liberty mean when so many others are dying? (Reviewed in our issue of 11/23/15.) (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

### Misery

Stephen King hit on an unlikely phobia with his 1987 novel: fear of the literary super-fan. What average reader couldn't relate? William Goldman, who wrote the screenplay for the 1990 film, has adapted the story for the stage, with Laurie Metcalf in the role that won Kathy Bates an Oscar. As a Colorado shut-in so invested in her favorite romance series that she kidnaps the author and forces him to write another sequel, Metcalf navigates the line between funny and creepy with what looks like relish. It could be, though, that she's just doing the heavy lifting that her scene partner, Bruce Willis, has relinquished: he convincingly simulates writhing pain, but not much else. The director, Will Frears, successfully stages moments of shock and suspense—not easy in a Broadway house—helped along by David Korins's incredible whirring set. But it's Metcalf's show, by default. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom

Teen-agers in an ominous suburban subdivision have become obsessed with a violent video game, and the players and their parents discover too slowly that the game has seeped into reality. Jennifer Haley's genuinely frightening script lives in the same neighborhood as David Lynch, David Cronenberg, and George Saunders, without feeling derivative; she's toying with dark ideas about adolescent rage, virtual realities, and American conformity, which only grow more disquieting as the play lingers in the mind. (It's hard not to make the grim connection, intentional or not, between the play's young killers and the real world's Internet-indoctrinated teen-age mass murderers.) Joel Schumacher, best known for helming Hollywood blockbusters, directs the Flea's house ensemble with black humor and a bare-bones aesthetic. The performances vary, but the horror is real. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

### Shear Madness

A thirty-seven-year-old play gets a wash and set for its New York debut. A typical afternoon in the Hell's Kitchen hair salon presided over by Tony, a swish stylist, and Barbara, a bobblehead hairdresser, is interrupted by the murder of the landlady upstairs and the appearance of two eager cops. The audience reconstructs the sequence

of events, then questions the suspects before voting on a murderer, an unusually democratic approach to law enforcement. Paradise for those delighted by gay-panic gags, it is purgatory for anyone else. The writers and producers have gussied up the show—a long-runner in Boston and D.C.—with New York place names and terrible topical jokes about Donald Trump and man buns. A few of the performers have the decency to look embarrassed by the worst of them, but most of the comedy is executed with near-hysterical fervor. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

### Steve

In Mark Gerrard's bittersweet dramedy, a little wishful sexting cues cascading midlife crises among a group of former show people—played by a group of veteran show people. When Steven (Matt McGrath), an ex-chorus boy turned stay-at-home father, discovers that his partner, Stephen (Malcolm Gets), is exchanging hot-and-heavy missives with a pal's boyfriend, everything suddenly seems in doubt. Making matters worse, an old friend is dying of cancer. Fortunately, there's a limber Argentinean waiter waiting to reinflate his self-esteem. Meanwhile, two other friends explore a live-in ménage with their personal trainer, Steve, avatar of unruly lust. (To each his own *crise*.) But it all works out. The New Group's production, directed by Cynthia Nixon, begins and ends with song; throughout, Broadway in-jokes and rapid-fire camp put-downs vivify the soapy male-menopausal narrative. Love, sex, death, aging, fatherhood—and all that jazz. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

### A View from the Bridge

The atmosphere of romanticized masculinity in Ivo van Hove's production has little to do with the melodramatic, Clifford Odets-like realism of Arthur Miller's script, from 1956. In the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, Eddie (Mark Strong), a tall, sinewy longshoreman, shares his flat with his wife, Beatrice (the laser-sharp Nicola Walker), and his beloved orphaned teenage niece, Catherine (Phoebe Fox). His feelings for Catherine are overwhelming; she makes him shy, love-struck, in a way that Beatrice does not—or, perhaps, that only Catherine can, largely because she's unattainable. In van Hove's hands, Miller's story of ethical betrayal becomes a story of how bodies look and move in a tragedy. Van Hove treats the text as a kind of libretto, punctuating Miller's flat words with effects, such as the portentous beating of a small drum offstage as Eddie spins more and more out of control. (11/23/15) (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

### OF NOTE HENRY IV

St. Ann's Warehouse inaugurates its new building with Donmar Warehouse's tough, emotional all-female rendering of Shakespeare's two-part epic on war, honor, and the nature of courage. The director, Phyllida Lloyd, succinctly traces the rise of Prince Hal (Clare Dunne) from prankster party kid to warrior, as he defeats the rebellious Hotspur (Jade Anouka), renounces the hedonistic Falstaff (Sophie Stanton), and earns his father's crown. (Henry is played by a powerful Harriet Walter.) Lloyd's ensemble reimagines the fifteenth-century fighters as prison inmates, clad in sweats, divvying up territory, and occasionally roused from their Shakespearean fantasies by uniformed guards. This conceit is both poignant and smart. Framing the action with chain-link fences, and illustrating it with candy-colored toys (no metal or glass, per prison regulation), Lloyd reveals the drama of honorable conquest—and the bloody terror it occasions—as so much destructive, meaningless mania. (45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

From *The New Yorker*  
writer and editor  
**ROGER ANGELL**

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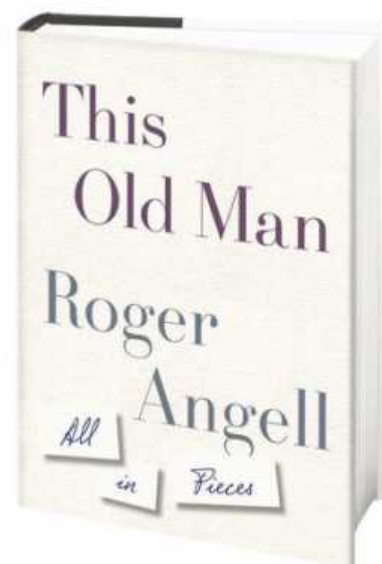
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# DANCE

## Complexions Contemporary Ballet

Founded twenty-one years ago by the Ailey stars Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson, this company is an amalgam of its leaders' artistic personalities: high-octane, intense, unrelentingly fierce. (Subtlety is not the company's forte.) It is also a model of diversity, a fact that lends its shows a welcome vitality. This two-week season includes no fewer than five premières by the prolific Rhoden. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 24-25 and Nov. 27-29.)

## Pilobolus

The changes of puberty can feel disturbingly surreal, but the transformations that occur to the pubescent female protagonist of "Shadowland" are little more than cool effects. Using a silhouette technique that's the full-body equivalent of shadow puppetry, the limber gymnasts of this performance collectively ingeniously conjure a dream world of seahorses, centaurs, and elephants. A Monty Pythonesque hand of God gives the girl the head of a dog; despite the indie-rock score by David Poe and Steven Banks, the production stays fully puppyish. (N.Y.U. Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-998-4941. Nov. 24-25 and Nov. 27-Dec. 1. Through Dec. 6.)

## "Nutcracker Rouge"

Yes, it's that time of the year. But this is not your ordinary "Nutcracker." Naughty, louche, and beautifully produced—in a sort of high-rococo burlesque style—Company XIV reimagines Clara's story as one of temptation leading to sexual discovery. Each of the "sweets" on offer reveals a new sensual delight. These are performed by a strong cast of dancers, acrobats, contortionists, and cross-dressing dominatrices. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 800-745-3000. Nov. 25-29 and Dec. 1. Through Jan. 17.)

## "Lorca Madly in Love"

Homosexual love is not often celebrated in flamenco shows. In this one, the Spanish dancer and choreographer David Morales portrays Federico García Lorca, evoking the playwright and poet in the days before he was executed in the Spanish Civil War, when he ignored signs of danger because of his love for another man. The acclaimed singer Miguel Poveda joins Morales's company of dancers and musicians. (Carnegie Hall, Seventh Ave. at 57th St. 212-247-7800. Nov. 25.)

## New York City Ballet / "The Nutcracker"

Once again, Marie will save the day with her little white slipper, the tree will grow through the

roof, and the wooden nutcracker will be magically transformed into a valiant, albeit miniature, prince. Together, the two will travel to the land of sweets, where they will be regaled with an assortment of dances, under the benevolent eye of the Sugarplum Fairy. The George Balanchine production, which made this ballet popular in the U.S. more than sixty years ago, offers a well-calibrated mix of charm, grandeur, and real, undiluted dancing. It's also a great place to see promising young dancers cut their teeth on their first big roles. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Nov. 27-29. Through Jan. 3.)

## "Works & Process" /

### Emily Coates & Sarah Demers

After stints performing with New York City Ballet and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, Coates started the Dance Studies curriculum at Yale. There she met Demers, a physics professor, and for the past few years the two have been teaching a course examining intersections between their disciplines. For this presentation, they're joined by the veteran dancers Irène Hultman and Jon Kinzel. (Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575. Nov. 30.)

# ABOVE & BEYOND

## The Brooklyn Bluegrass Bash

Park Slope's Old First Reformed Church served more than two hundred thousand meals for storm victims left stranded after Hurricane Sandy. In the summertime, the church hosts a respite shelter for homeless men, and its doors have stayed open for Brooklyn residents seeking momentary refuge from city stir. The roof suffered significant damage in 2012, and organizers set out to raise money for repairs. The Fourth Annual Brooklyn Bluegrass Bash delivers some all-star talent, including Michael Daves and the Goodbye Girls; proceeds will go toward restoring the sanctuary. (The Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Nov. 29.)

## Brooklyn Holiday Bazaar

In one of the year's more stinging losses, New York City's largest nocturnal flea market/food court/concert venue, Brooklyn Night Bazaar, shuttered in May. The automaker BMW purchased the much loved Williamsburg space, and the crew soon reorganized out on Riis Park Beach, but the void was felt by many Kings County residents who enjoyed its spread of vintage goods and eclectic music programming. For two days, at Gowanus's 501 Union, Brooklyn Makers revives

the spirit of the space, gathering more than forty local entrepreneurs shilling holiday gifts for those ahead on their shopping. Free cocktails, a live d.j., and a professional photobooth round out the weekend, and craft workshops will keep the youngest patrons well occupied. (501 Union St., Brooklyn. brooklynholidaybazaar.com. Nov. 28-29.)

## READINGS AND TALKS

### The Powerhouse Arena

The illustrator and author Molly Crabapple—born in Queens, sharpened at the Manhattan burlesque theatre the Box—emerged as a much sought voice of snarky dissent during 2011's Occupy Wall Street movement. *Rolling Stone* calls her "Occupy's greatest artist," and the magazine's resident firebrand, Matt Taibbi, will help her launch "Drawing Blood," a collection of political and autobiographical illustrations and short stories that chronicle the first fifteen years of what she calls our "fractious" twenty-first century. (37 Main St., Brooklyn. 718-666-3049. Nov. 30 at 7.)

### McNally Jackson

Join the experimental filmmaker Ken Jacobs and the essayist George Hunka in celebration of the avant-garde theatre pioneer Richard Foreman.

He'll read from and discuss two 2013 works, "The Manifestos and Essays" and "Plays with Films," the latter of which compiles texts of the final three productions staged at his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre. The author is known for the cerebral, surrealist plays he's been crafting for more than four decades, steadfast in his dedication to the fringe arts movements that blossomed in New York in the nineteen-seventies and have since become harder to find. (52 Prince St. 212-274-1160. Nov. 30.)

## Kings Theatre

The celebrated astrophysicist, author, and television host Neil deGrasse Tyson has accomplished quite a feat, bringing a casual whimsy back to the increasingly politicized and commercialized worlds of science and technology. But he doesn't exactly have his head in the clouds. In a 2006 piece for *Natural History* titled "Delusions of Space Enthusiasts," Tyson takes a rationalist's position on space travel, weighing the cultural longing for interstellar exploration against the geopolitical and economic factors that inhibit it. He presents a multimedia talk that, with his characteristic humor and delicacy, traces the history of aviation. (1027 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn. 718-856-5464. Dec. 1.)





## TABLES FOR TWO

# SUSHI AZABU / AZABU

428 Greenwich St. (212-274-0428)

ON A DESOLATE BLOCK in Tribeca, there's a sweet little subterranean sushi den with nine seats and a rare, rather sublime intimacy. It isn't particularly fancy (though it is not cheap), and if you want a show with your sushi do not come here. There are no truffles, no pickled Thai chilies, no rock music, no dancing shrimp. Just calm, quiet omakase. It's rather shocking.

To get there, you must first announce your reservation (imperative most nights) and wait to be led through the loungelike ground-floor restaurant (the recently renamed Azabu, formerly Daruma-ya, and Greenwich Grill before that) past the dark *noren* curtains and down a narrow flight of steps. Once seated at the warm-wood bar, you choose a price point (among four), and a Japanese-inflected cocktail or, perhaps, a bottle from forty or so sakes. An epic procession begins: a square of piquant cured tuna, a small ceramic cup of velvety uni risotto, a gorgeous pair of cold kumamoto oysters topped with fresh grated wasabi—when announcing this last part, the young sushi chef, Tasuku Murakami, points to the gigantic gnarled green wasabi root displayed in a case: See? It's very fresh. Murakami speaks little English and kindly waits until you are done talking—even if this is a very long time—to place the next course in front of you, so he can tell you what it is. After sashimi comes a parade of nigiri, each delicate piece brushed with this tiny bit of sauce or that—*kinmedai* (golden eye snapper), *hirame* (fluke), meaty *shima aji* (striped horse mackerel), silky yellowtail, sweet *hotate* (sea scallop), torched eel, creamy *tamago* (egg custard). It's a very pleasant barrage. The dishes seem to make Murakami happy, and his humble bonhomie—or is it the floral, perfectly dry Tedorigawa sake?—has a relaxing effect. Even though the well-heeled couple at one end of the bar and the politely boisterous millennial Japanese tourists at the other are strangers, by the end of the night all have tacitly bonded, part of an elegant clandestine basement party.

Upstairs, in the izakaya, the scene is louder, and less precise. One evening, a waiter mentioned no fewer than three times that Sushi Azabu is a Michelin-starred restaurant, as if the honor extended up the stairs and through the curtains. Not quite. At Azabu, the same sushi you can get downstairs seems too expensive for the casual setting (sashimi plates start at fifty dollars), and the kitchen dishes are hit or miss (baked crab was unpleasantly fishy). But the ladies out on the town, finance types, and soba hounds who come here can eat well, if they order right: uncomplicated, naturally umami-rich dishes like Japanese eggplant, fresh tofu with plentiful uni, and excellent house-made soba noodles. For some, the sound of slurping is as calming as a babbling brook.

—Shauna Lyon

Sushi Azabu open daily for dinner; omakase \$100-\$180. Azabu open weekdays for lunch and dinner and weekends for dinner; dishes \$7-\$100.

## FOOD & DRINK

### BAR TAB CALEDONIA

1609 Second Ave. (212-734-4300)  
“Is it ‘Ee-lah’ or ‘Eye-lah?’” a patron at this Upper East Side bar asked a few nights ago, starting a conversation with some syllables. “It’s ‘Eye-lah,’ ” Michael, the owner and bartender, replied. As a Dundonian and a whiskey expert, his word was final. Islay is the renowned Scotch-making island off the western coast of Scotland, and its name is set in golden letters above one of the five sections of the bar’s dark wooden shelves. Each holds the distillations of a different region of the country; the lower shelves harbor whiskeys from Japan, Tasmania, and Taiwan and some other non-whiskey spirits. “Are you double fisting, or, as we call it in Scotland, drinking?” Michael joked, as he served a creamy pint of Belhaven ale alongside a smooth and sweet Bunnahabhain Toiteach (“the ‘bh’ is a ‘v,’ ” he offered helpfully), whose aroma piqued nostrils from a tulip-shaped Glencairn glass. The soft-yolked Scotch egg with mustard sauce was a hearty addition to the drinks, but perhaps not enough of a base to sustain a formidable dramming rate. As strains of Fine Young Cannibals bounced through the air, customers mused over phenol parts per million (the rough measure of a Scotch’s peatiness) and their plans for the days to come. “I’m getting sworn in this week,” Michael said. After eleven years in the U.S., he’d passed his citizenship test. Soon he’ll be double fisting passports.

—Colin Stokes



From  
**STACY SCHIFF**  
#1 bestselling author of  
*CLEOPATRA*

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## THE TALK OF THE TOWN

### COMMENT ISIS AFTER PARIS

In the week since the attacks on Paris, there has been a great deal of talk about waging war on the Islamic State, but scant clarity about how such a war might succeed. In a season when the improvisations of Vladimir Putin shape geopolitics, and those of Donald Trump shape American politics (Trump has remarked that Putin is “getting an A” for leadership), it is perhaps unsurprising that public discourse about what comes next has been informed by opportunism and incoherence. Yet even the sober, often stirring rhetoric of the French President, François Hollande, has often elided the main problem, which involves aligning aims with realistic means. “France is at war,” Hollande told his parliament last week, as French jets struck Raqqa, Syria, the Islamic State’s self-declared capital. He vowed to “eradicate” the organization. But how, and how long will it take?

In 2004, James D. Fearon, a political scientist at Stanford, published a study, “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?,” in which he and a colleague analyzed scores of civil wars fought between 1945 and 1999. Some of the findings were intuitive: civil wars end quickly when one side has a decisive military advantage over the other; poor countries with natural resources to export often have long internal wars, because whoever controls the resources also controls the national treasury. Other findings were novel, such as the fact that wars following coups d’état tend to be short. In another study, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” Fearon and the political scientist David D. Laitin discovered that even though in nations with exceptional ethnic pluralism, like Syria and Iraq, lines of conflict may be defined by ethnic identity, pluralism itself is not a notable predictor of civil war; poverty is a much more significant factor.

Rereading these works in light of the infuriating problem of the Islamic State, two discouraging findings stand out. In 1945, many civil wars were

concluded after about two years. By 1999, they lasted, on average, about sixteen years. And conflicts in which a guerrilla group could finance itself—by selling contraband drug crops, or by smuggling oil—might go on for thirty or forty years. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, has been around since 1964, sustained in no small part by American cocaine consumption.

The Islamic State is an oil-funded descendant of Al Qaeda in Iraq, a branch of the original Al Qaeda, which was formed in 1988. According to the C.I.A., ISIS has at least twenty thousand armed fighters; some estimates put the number much higher. It controls large swaths of territory, including major cities, such as Mosul. It is unusually barbarous, and good at Twitter. Its millenarian ideology of hatred and extermination poses a threat across borders. Yet its army and its sanctuary, in Iraq and Syria, are not, in a structural sense, exceptional.

From the American intervention in Somalia, in 1992, through the French intervention in Mali, in 2013, industrialized countries have been able to deploy ground forces to take guerrilla-held territory in about sixty days or less. The problem is that if they don’t then leave, to be replaced by more locally credible yet militarily able forces, they invite frustration, and risk unsustainable casualties and political if

not military defeat. This has been true even when the guerrilla forces were weak: the Taliban possesses neither planes nor significant anti-aircraft missiles, yet it has fought the United States to a stalemate, and the advantage is now shifting in its favor.

If President Obama ordered the Marines into urgent action, they could be waving flags of liberation in Raqqa by New Year’s. But, after taking the region, killing scores of ISIS commanders as well as Syrian civilians, and flushing surviving fighters and international recruits into the broken, ungoverned cities of Syria and Iraq’s Sunni heartland, then what? Without political



coöperation from Bashar al-Assad, Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, Iraqi Shiite militias, Turkey, the Al Qaeda ally Al Nusra, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and others, the Marines (and the French or NATO allies that might assist them) would soon become targets for a mind-bogglingly diverse array of opponents.

Syrian rebels overwhelmingly regard Assad's regime as their main enemy, and for good reason: his forces have killed more Syrians than anyone else has. In the absence of a political agreement with Assad or his removal from office, it is impossible to conceive of a Muslim-majority occupation force that would be able and willing to keep the peace after the Marines departed. Some may argue that it would be worthwhile, nonetheless, to wipe out the Islamic State on the ground and deal with the fallout later. After Paris, such an approach may hold emotional appeal. After Afghanistan and Iraq, however, it is not a responsible course of action.

Analyses like James Fearon's suggest that there are perhaps two ways to end, or at least to contain, long wars. One is to accept that success will be a long time coming, and to adopt a posture of military and diplomatic patience and persistence. That may yet lead to the FARC's disarmament. The other is to negotiate aggressively to form international alliances, which will allow for a rapid, decisive use of force on the ground. The European Union activated a mutual-defense compact after the Paris attacks; NATO could broaden the alliance by invok-

ing Article 5 of its treaty, as it did after 9/11. Such coalitions can be swiftly effective. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, George H.W. Bush and James Baker pulled together an unexpected military alliance to force his retreat. In Afghanistan, George W. Bush overthrew the Taliban with worldwide support. Both actions eliminated the immediate threat, but neither resolved the targeted country's underlying instability, or assured durable international security. (On Friday, Islamist terrorists staged a murderous raid on a hotel in Mali's capital, Bamako, almost three years after the French-led intervention in that country.)

Barack Obama has all but ruled out a ground intervention in Syria or Iraq. Instead, last week he promised "an intensification" of the strategy he is already pursuing: Special Forces raids, air strikes, and diplomatic conferences to try to resolve the Syrian war, perhaps by declaring ceasefires or insuring Putin's coöperation. "A political solution is the only way to end the war in Syria and unite the Syrian people and the world" against the Islamic State, the President said. Unfortunately, right now that looks no more realistic than a prolonged American occupation of Raqqa. Obama's caution in the Middle East since the Arab Spring is a reminder that there are perhaps as many risks attendant upon inaction as upon action. The dilemmas suggested by Fearon's research won't evaporate; they will be on the desk of Obama's successor.

—Steve Coll

## BROTHERHOOD OF MAN TRAILBLAZERS



Michael Davies and Roger Bennett, better known to American soccer fans as Men in Blazers, spend their days in an almost comically cramped studio in lower Manhattan. There they produce a weekly podcast ostensibly about soccer and a half-hour highlight show for NBC Sports. But last weekend they ventured out to Brooklyn to meet their fans, who'd gathered for a celebration of soccer that the Men in Blazers had dubbed BlazerCon. The two often call soccer "America's sport of the future—as it has been since 1972"; BlazerCon was organized on the notion that this future had finally arrived.

More than a thousand people from sixteen states and across Europe showed up at the Brooklyn Expo Center, in Greenpoint, to hear Davies and Bennett interview players, TV commentators, club owners, and coaches, and

to hear them make self-deprecating jokes about being bald or being English. Attendees could challenge professional soccer players (Dax McCarty and Shaun Wright-Phillips, of the New York Red Bulls) to a round of FIFA 16, a popular video game; get a haircut in the style of their favorite international footballer ("An Olivier Giroud, please!"); or have a "Men in Blazers" patch sewn on their own blazer. Topps, the baseball-card company, had a booth selling soccer cards.

When Bennett moved to the States, in 1993, soccer was, he said, "worse than irrelevant—it was reviled." Now the networks broadcast English Premier League matches. One fan arrived wearing the uniform of the Columbus Crew, the team he grew up supporting, back in Ohio: short-sleeved jersey, shorts, and knee socks, all yellow. He was a "full-kit wanker," a species rarely seen in the wild. "It's a real commitment," he said, patting his sides. "No pockets." He carried his phone and a coat in a shopping bag.

Another young man, Brett Harman, who'd travelled from Trenton, New Jersey, explained that he'd decided which team to support by playing FIFA,

the video game. He often played as the legendary Ukrainian striker Andriy Shevchenko, and when Shevchenko left A.C. Milan for Chelsea he followed. Now Harman is a Chelsea devotee and hopes one day to see the team play at Stamford Bridge, their stadium in London. He wore a Frank Lampard jersey, with a pillow stuffed under his shirt. It was an inside joke, he said, one that the Men in Blazers would certainly understand.

Backstage, mingling in the greenroom, were heads of foreign leagues, chairmen of various English Premier League sides, television sports personalities, three members of the World Cup-winning American Women's National Team, and Sunil Gulati, the head of the U.S. Soccer Federation. Also in attendance: Charlie Wallwork, age eleven, who'd been invited by Davies and Bennett and had flown from Manchester, England. Charlie rocketed to fame about a year ago, when he was interviewed after a match outside Old Trafford, Manchester United's stadium. His spontaneous post-game analysis was succinct and heartfelt. "We played like eleven players who were all best friends!" he said, looking directly into the camera.



"The video went viral," Wallwork explained backstage. He was preparing to speak about his experience to more than a thousand fellow-fans, most of them three times his age. Wallwork wore a No. 7 Man. U. jersey, with "CHARLIE IS A RED" emblazoned on the back, and a red cast on his left arm. He offered two explanations for his injury: either he landed wrong after scoring an overhead kick in the schoolyard or he fell off the jungle gym.

The convention began on Friday, just as the news from Paris was beginning to filter out and the scale of the horror was becoming clear. Bennett and Davies began the proceedings by calling for a moment of silence. Both were shaken by the news, but the relentless schedule didn't leave much room for reflection. During the final presentation, Bennett and Davies were past the point of exhaustion, fumbling with their cue cards, stammering, falling apart as charmingly as they could manage. Bennett mentioned Paris, choking up, and Davies told the crowd, "Now the sport is more important than ever." Three suicide bombers had attacked the Stade de France, after all, where the multiracial, multi-ethnic French national team won the World Cup, in 1998. From amid the crowd of soccer fans, a voice called out, "*Allez les Bleus!*"

—Daniel Alarcón

## THE ARTISTIC LIFE IN CHARACTER



The other day, a black town car with tinted windows pulled up to the David Zwirner gallery, on Nineteenth Street, and the actor Dennis Quaid, an hour late, emerged from the back seat. "Sorry! It's been a whirlwind," he said. "I was in Cannes, France, forty-eight hours ago." He pronounced the city's name "Ken"; "France" rhymed with "tents." He flashed his familiar grudge-deflating grin, the creases around his mouth forming right angles, and added that he'd spent the previous evening with his twenty-three-

year-old son, Jack (mother: Meg Ryan), who is also an actor. "We stayed up till three," Quaid, who is sixty-one, boasted.

He kept his mirrored sunglasses on as he entered the gallery, which featured works by Isa Genzken—mannequins in Technicolor ensembles and wigs were scattered about. He peered at what looked like flattened disco balls on one wall. "I like these four squares here," he said. "My background in art is mostly appreciation and drawing. I can't really draw a perfect circle or whatever, but I draw things that reflect what's going on inside of me." He noted that van Gogh (whom he learned about, as a kid, from the Kirk Douglas movie "Lust for Life") was his favorite artist, "period."

He was on a Chelsea gallery crawl, inspired by his new TV show, "The Art of More," which, according to press materials, "explores the underbelly and surprisingly cutthroat world of premium auction houses." Quaid is an executive producer and plays Samuel Brukner, a caddish real-estate mogul and mega collector. The series is light on the art (except for an arc involving a forged van Gogh), and heavy on rock memorabilia, looted antiquities, and sports cars. Ten episodes were released last week, on Crackle, Sony's bid for streaming relevancy.

Quaid, who wore a fitted blazer over a T-shirt, recalled his first art acquisition, in 1982, a de Kooning drawing of "a man or a woman coming out of the ocean," which had been suggested to him by his former agent, Bob Gersh. As he strolled into another room, filled with Wolfgang Tillmans photographs, he described his latest purchase: a Degas charcoal study of a circus performer. "I'd like to have a Warhol," he said. "I'd take what I could get. Marilyn or the Mao. Didn't he do a Marlon Brando?"

"Starry, starry night!" Quaid exclaimed in front of a photo of distant lights. "They're probably towns, but it looks like little forest fires." He knew all about those; he recently sold a ranch in Montana that had been damaged by one. (He counts horseback riding and aviation as hobbies, among more regular Hollywood ones, like golf.) "It looked like an atom bomb had gone off," he said.

So why a TV drama about art? "No-

body has really explored that world yet in television," Quaid said. "It's been done in movies, in bio-pics. It's usually the stereotypical story: Artists are struggling. Misunderstood. They hear 'no,' lots of rejection. Finally, they make it. Then they burn out. They change. Then they either die or . . ." He paused to examine a large image of a hairy scrotum. The alternate ending remained a mystery.

Out on Eleventh Avenue, he puffed on an e-cigarette and discussed his "Art of More" character. "He's very flawed," Quaid said. "He's real." (From a monologue about a stormy yacht ride: "I find the captain, even *he's* throwing up. I grab him by the ear, I say, 'Look, you bastard, I don't care if this



Dennis Quaid

tub goes down—do not let the Picasso get wet.'") Quaid ambled over to a Dan Flavin show—minimalist neon sculptures—and elaborated: "My character was a guy who probably started out building little pod malls and then wound up in New York, and now he's building office towers."

Quaid grew up in Houston. His mother was a real-estate agent, his father an electrician. He dropped out of college and followed his brother Randy (actor turned tabloid fodder) to Hollywood. In the gallery, he whispered, "They don't allow photography in here, do they?" and took a selfie with some glowing yellow tubes. "It's just really good light."

In the Anton Kern Gallery, Quaid's phone rang. He looked at the caller I.D. "It's my mom," he said, pocketing the still ringing phone. "It'll be a long

conversation if I pick up.” The phone rang again. It was his agent. He picked up.

Next was the Gagorian Gallery. On the way, Quaid pondered Jackson Pollock, another favorite. He said, “I relate a lot with him. He just seemed like a *guy*, you know? Troubled as he was.” As he gazed at a Lichtenstein painting of a painting, he asked, “What do you think makes art?” Beyond being shown at Gagorian? “I think time defines art in the end,” Quaid said. “If it holds up. If it still speaks in, like, twenty-five years.”

—Emma Allen

## LAST CALL DEPT. UP ON THE ROOF



Jancis Robinson, the British wine writer and the editor of “The Oxford Companion to Wine,” is also a member of the Royal Household Wine Committee, which meets for tastings in the cellars of Buckingham Palace. Recently, she happened to be in New York on a weekend when there was an advertised opportunity to camp out overnight in a vineyard in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. At nine o’clock on a Saturday evening, at the end of a week filled with sommeliers, tastings, and Mario Batali, Robinson put on her down coat, took a taxi to Brooklyn, walked up to the top of a former warehouse, and went out onto its fifteen-thousand-square-foot roof, which is leased to a company called Rooftop Reds. “It’s jolly cold, isn’t it? I mean, God,” she said. She was relieved to remember that she hadn’t committed to staying until morning.

In one direction, there were views of Manhattan; in the other, downtown Brooklyn. In between, Robinson could see a hammock, a few small domed tents, and a hundred or so vines in waist-high aluminum planters. There was also a white tent about the size of a boxcar. It glowed; there was the chatter of a dozen people finishing dinner. They sounded high-spirited, or at least determined not to regret having spent three hundred and thirty

dollars per couple to camp out in a spot that one day may be able to describe itself as the city’s first commercial vineyard, but until then could more easily be thought of as a blustery roof, with unproven vines, next to a power station.

“These are baby, baby vines,” Robinson said. Even allowing for perfect ripening, they could produce only “a tiny, tiny, tiny amount of wine.” She was not dismissive, but the idea of an urban vineyard—rather than an urban winery, using grapes grown elsewhere—was unfamiliar, and it contained economic and cultural mysteries. “I’m just not sure why the public would want a wine that was made from grapes grown on a roof in Brooklyn,” she said. She inspected a planter. “I hope they didn’t have these specially made. I hope they’re recycled from somewhere.”

Devin Shomaker, the thirty-one-year-old C.E.O. of Rooftop Reds, stepped out of the white tent and welcomed Robinson, and told her that the planters were custom-made. Shomaker



Jancis Robinson

has qualifications in both viticulture and marketing. As a younger man, he organized the first beer-pong tournament in China. His conversational style has unusually strong notes of keynote speech. He told Robinson that he was trying to give New Yorkers a “grape-to-bottle experience.”

She asked why. He replied, “People are inspired by local movements, and by the fact that there’s manufacturing, even agricultural manufacturing, right here in New York City.” (A longer an-

swer might have described the extent to which Rooftop Reds is a marketing satellite for its primary backer, an upstate winery called Point of the Bluff.)

In a friendly way, Robinson suggested that a visitor to the roof wouldn’t have the experience of “what you might call a real vineyard.” Shomaker, a little defensive, said that the work made him happy. He invited Robinson into the dinner tent. The campers, in their thirties, were loud and welcoming; Robinson was offered heat pads to put in her shoes. Brendan McInnes, a school handyman from Bay Ridge, told Robinson that, under his girlfriend’s influence, he had fully switched from beer to wine; he’d heard about “Red-top,” as he referred to the venue, on a visit upstate to “a what do you call it,” he said. (A winery.) He laughed. “Sorry, sorry. I’m a little buzzed. Apologize.”

There was a wine on the table whose label was a photograph of the Manhattan skyline, along with the words “Chardonnay,” “New York,” and “Rooftop Reds.” (This was a Point of the Bluff wine, from the Finger Lakes.) There was also a red wine, made with California grapes, whose label read, simply, “Point of the Bluff Vineyards.” Later, out of Shomaker’s hearing, Robinson said, “I think if your whole shtick is local, it’s a *little* surprising to be serving a California wine.”

She took a sip of an upstate Riesling. “It’s not the most concentrated wine you’re ever going to come across,” she said, but it was “clean and fresh,” and well balanced.

Shomaker, standing, called for a vote on the post-supper movie: “The Silence of the Lambs” or “The Sound of Music.” There was a brief, raucous debate, involving snatches of song. Robinson turned down a s’more, and explained that the primary task of the Royal Household Wine Committee is to find cheapish wine for large royal receptions. The video projector wouldn’t work. Shomaker made a phone call, while plugging and unplugging cables. Then Julie Andrews was dashing across a meadow, to cheers, and Robinson—noting how happy everyone seemed—said something about the threads in life’s rich tapestry.

—Ian Parker



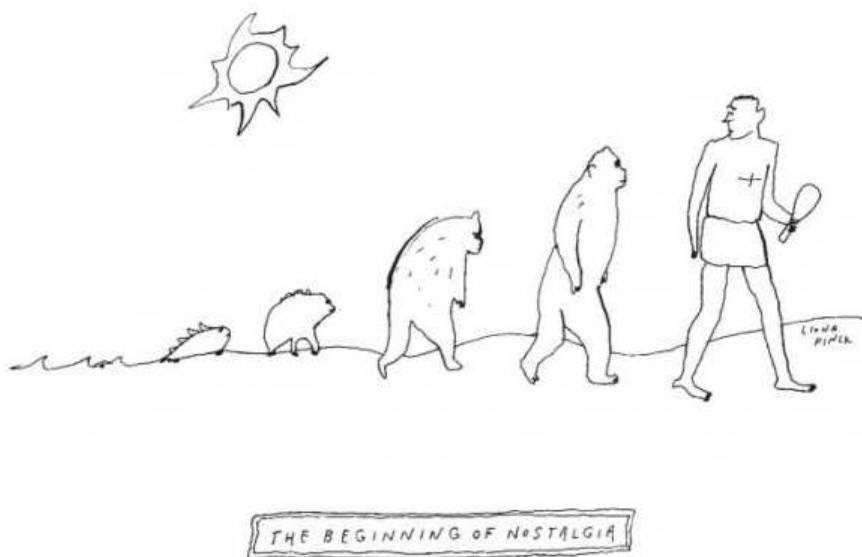


It's a hundred years this month since Albert Einstein completed his general theory of relativity, and don't imagine that the people at the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, where Einstein spent the last twenty-two years of his life, aren't marking the occasion. "It's a theory that needed a hundred years to come to full bloom—which is great for science, but less if you are the individual," Robbert Dijkgraaf, the institute's director, said the other evening, in the lobby of the Richardson Auditorium.

It was the opening night of a two-day conference celebrating Einstein's discoveries. "There are some people in the audience who are good candidates to be the next Einstein," Dijkgraaf said. First on the program was the premiere of "Light Falls," a multimedia work written by Brian Greene, a string theorist and a professor at Columbia University. The piece was designed by 59 Productions, the team that won a Tony for "An American in Paris," and directed by Scott Faris, who was behind "Walking with Dinosaurs."

In "Light Falls," Einstein is played by the actor Michael Winther, and the workings of his mind are conveyed by means of digital effects projected onto a scrim. Greene, dressed in skinny black jeans, a black shirt, and a black blazer, narrates, telling the story of Einstein's discovery in language accessible even to audience members without a Ph.D. He debunks the myth of Einstein's early lack of math aptitude—"Einstein was the kind of kid who today would be nicknamed Einstein," he notes—and speaks soaringly of Einstein's discoveries, while pacing TED Talk-like, occasionally stopping in a wide stance and rocking back slightly, body language for "This is completely awesome."

Backstage, before the performance, Greene explained his motivation for stepping out of the academy and onto the stage. "So many people don't really



understand what science is about," he said. "I am talking about the process, which is this dramatic story of discovery, of really peeling away the layers that obscure how the universe works." Greene, who is fifty-two, first found out that he liked being onstage when he was a student at Stuyvesant High School. During a class, he delivered a talk to other students on the subject of dreams. "It just kind of brought the class alive, and it felt like, Wow, you can take real ideas from science and put them out there in a way that kids can get really excited about, and not be, like, groaning."

Greene showed early promise in math. "My dad was a high-school dropout, but knew enough to teach me the basics of arithmetic," he recalled. "When I was five, he set me the problem of calculating the number of inches between here and the Andromeda galaxy. That is kind of involved: you have to multiply this number by that number, and get big sheets of construction paper. I thought, This is great." Mathphobics everywhere should be consoled, however, to learn that even Greene struggles to comprehend the homework assigned to his own kids, who are in the fifth and third grades. "It's all about strategies—'Come up with a strategy'—and my kids are, like, 'I don't have a strategy, I just know it.'"

"Math is hard for just about everybody," he went on. "It is not what our

brains evolved to do. Our brains evolved to survive in the wilderness. You didn't have to take exponentials or use imaginary numbers in order to avoid that lion or that tiger or to catch that bison for dinner. So the brain is not wired, literally, to do the kinds of things that we now want it to do." In "Light Falls," pages from Einstein's notebook are projected so that viewers can see the traces of his mind at work. "He starts with a blank page, and he thinks of some kind of mathematical relation that may be able to describe the physics that he's thinking about, and then he starts with that equation. He thinks, O.K., with that as a starting point, let me manipulate it," Greene said. "And then you come to the act of inspiration, where, after manipulating the equations, you say, Wow, look at that—the pattern right there in the equations aligns with that pattern of gravity, or that pattern of motion."

It was time for Greene to get back onstage for some final tech adjustments. He recalled a handful of times in his life when the equations he'd been drawing up came together to reveal something revolutionary. "The tearing of space—that is one we did right here at the Institute for Advanced Study, and in the equations you could see it happening," he said. "But Einstein did this kind of thing all the time. And that's the difference."

—Rebecca Mead

LETTER FROM PARIS

# THE LONG NIGHT

*Terrorist attacks and a city changed.*

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ



At half past nine in the evening, on Friday, November 13th, Matthieu, a thirty-three-year-old resident of Paris, was eating dinner outside with friends at Le Petit Cambodge, a restaurant in the Tenth Arrondissement, near the Canal Saint-Martin. The Canal is a cosmopolitan neighborhood, and a favorite destination for the city's twenty- and thirty-somethings. The restaurant serves Cambodian food in an atmosphere of industrial chic, with long tables, lots of brushed steel, and naked light bulbs. The evening was mild. Across the street, at a comfortably dingy bar called Le Carillon, patrons were mingling on the sidewalk with their drinks.

A car screeched to a stop a few feet

from where Matthieu was sitting and a man jumped out, firing a Kalashnikov. For a moment, Matthieu thought he was watching a private settling of scores. Then the man fired a second burst; there was a tremendous shattering of windows and bottles. Matthieu leapt over the table and started running. At the top of the street, he stopped and listened. It was only then that he realized that a bullet had lodged in his left hand. His pinkie and ring fingers hung at a crooked angle.

"The terrible thing is that I saw I was out of danger, and so I had two options," he told me. "I could either leave or go back to see my friends, at the risk of being shot again."

We were sitting in Matthieu's apart-

ment, close to Père Lachaise Cemetery. I'd met him four years earlier through mutual friends, but, aside from running into each other at their wedding, we hadn't been in touch since. He spoke wearily, pausing frequently to take long, shaking breaths. His left hand was bandaged, the two damaged fingers trussed together, a hospital bracelet still around his wrist. In his good hand he held a cigarette, which trembled as he moved it to his lips. Two days had passed since the attacks, which were organized by an ISIS terrorist cell with roots near Brussels and carried out simultaneously at six locations around Paris. Three suicide bombers had blown themselves up outside the Stade de France during a France-Germany soccer match, killing one civilian. At the Bataclan, a concert venue on the Boulevard Voltaire, three gunmen fired into the trapped crowd. The official death toll of a hundred and twenty-nine was sure to rise.

Once he heard the gunfire stop, Matthieu made his way back to the restaurant. "I saw a lot of women dead on the ground," he said, his voice catching on the "f" of *femmes*. "It was mostly women that I saw." He found one of his friends, a Brazilian studying in Paris, lying in the middle of the street. She had been seated across from him, and was shot in the chest. Matthieu sat on the ground and held her legs, feeling her shallow breathing. She would survive.

People were running through the streets in an eruption of panic, shouting as the police arrived and tried to establish order. The scene couldn't be secured; Matthieu worried that the shooters might return. Next to him, a man without injuries held his girlfriend's lifeless body in his arms. Then, without warning, he ran off. The woman was about twenty-five and very beautiful. Matthieu searched for words to describe her perfect, uncanny stillness.

A few medical workers came to the scene almost immediately. Le Petit Cambodge and Le Carillon, which also came under fire, are down the street from l'Hôpital Saint-Louis, one of Paris's largest hospitals. But because of the number and severity of the attacks, and a confusion about whether the killers might still be at large, it took nearly two hours for ambulances to begin evacuating people.

As Matthieu was loaded into an am-

*"I was angry after Charlie Hebdo," one Parisian said. "Now I am désespéré."*



balance, medics told him that he had been shot in the small of the back; adrenaline had masked the pain. The bullet had stopped just short of his spine. Surgeons at the hospital where he was taken told him it was riskier to remove it than not. He asked them to try anyway. "I'm going to spend the rest of my life with this tool of Daesh"—the Arabic acronym for ISIS widely used in France—"in my body?" He rolled an imaginary pellet in his fingers, then released it with a shudder. The bullet was extracted.

All last week in Paris, survivors of the attacks recounted their experiences on television, intercut with smiling Facebook profile pictures of the murdered as well as head shots of the terrorists. "LE VISAGE DE LA TERREUR" read the headline on the Thursday cover of *Libération*, next to a picture of Abdelhamid Abaoud, the young Belgian jihadist who had directed the attacks, grinning warmly, like a man in a vacation photo. He had been killed the day before, with at least two others, during a raid by French special forces on a house in the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis. A number of accomplices had been arrested. Saleh Abdeslam, who with his brother had taken part in the attacks, was still on the run.

Apprehension took hold of the city. Two weeks earlier, ISIS had claimed responsibility for blowing up a Russian commercial jet leaving the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, killing its two hundred and twenty-four passengers. On the day before the attacks in Paris, two ISIS suicide bombers murdered forty-three people in a suburb of Beirut. Last Friday, news came that gunmen had stormed a Radisson hotel in Mali and taken some hundred and seventy hostages, separating out Muslims from non-Muslims; supporters of ISIS celebrated on Twitter.

The day after seeing Matthieu, I visited Patrick Aeberhard, a cardiologist and a co-founder of Médecins sans Frontières, at his apartment overlooking the Canal Saint-Martin, across the street from a café called La Bonne Bière. We watched François Hollande on television addressing a joint session of the French Parliament at Versailles. Hollande strode through a corridor lined with guards in red-plumed hats, sheathed sabres at their sides, and into the assembly hall. "France is at war," he said. A bombing campaign

on Raqqa, an ISIS stronghold in Syria, had begun the night before. Hollande invoked a clause of a European Union treaty which calls for other member states to come to the aid of a country under attack, and proposed changes to France's constitution to facilitate the prosecution of terrorists.

After Hollande finished speaking, the Parliament rose to sing the "Marseillaise." At the lines "Against us, tyranny! The bloody standard is raised!" Aeberhard muted the television. On the evening of the attacks, he had been returning home from the funeral of his friend the philosopher André Glucksmann when he heard gunfire. "Since I'm sort of used to countries in the midst of war, I recognized the sound of Kalashnikovs right away," he said.

On the sidewalk in front of La Bonne Bière, a young woman had been shot in the thigh; her companion had a bullet in his shoulder. He went to help them, thinking, as Matthieu had, that he was witness to some private act of revenge. Then he saw people inside the restaurant administering chest compressions to others lying on the ground. Four other people lay nearby, clearly dead. He treated the woman, using tourniquets made from strips of napkins and tablecloths that waiters brought to him, and went inside to help. A few first-aid responders arrived. "They began to organize a hospital in the restaurant," he told me. With Médecins sans Frontières, and later with the group Médecins du Monde, Aeberhard had seen conflicts in Lebanon, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Ethiopia, and Rwanda, among many other countries. The situation reminded him of what he had seen in Beirut: "Blood absolutely everywhere—it was a war scene."

Just as at Le Petit Cambodge, ambulances were slow to arrive. "We waited a very, very long time," Aeberhard told me. "I think we lost one or two people." When they did come, triage proved complicated. "There was a woman who had been shot in the stomach, and who was doing much better sitting up," Aeberhard said. She was almost passed over in favor of people who were splayed on the ground with wounds that were less dire. "I had to fight for them to take her in the first round."

A *plan blanc*, the city's procedure for calling all medical staff to its hospitals in moments of crisis, had gone into

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effect. Another doctor I spoke with told me that patients began arriving at his hospital around midnight, two to an ambulance. He said that although his colleagues were used to handling traumatic injuries, “there was a psychological dimension to this that none of us had ever experienced before.”

Families rushed to hospital entrances but couldn’t get in; medical staff had little sense of what was going on outside. There hadn’t been time to perform proper identification of the injured and the dead, and, in the days that followed, people roamed from hospital to hospital in search of the missing. Nearly a week later, a full list of names still hadn’t been released.

Aeberhard was born in Paris in 1945, and began studying to become a doctor in his teens—“the classic path of the overprotected bourgeois child,” he said. He was a *soixante-huitard*, one of the youths who participated in the student protests of May, 1968, but he quickly grew disillusioned with the ability of demonstrations to effect political change. That fall, as a hospital intern, he had responded to a Red Cross campaign soliciting medical volunteers to help out in Biafra; Médecins sans Frontières was created three years later.

By 1975, Aeberhard was working part time for the organization and also had a cardiology practice in Saint-Denis, just down the street from the house where the terrorists were found. He worked there until six months ago, and had observed firsthand the demographic shift that had taken place in the neighborhood during the eighties and nineties. The postwar French working-class population had been replaced by immigrants from poorer European countries, like Portugal, Italy, and Poland. Then came the Maghrébins—people from the former French colonies of North Africa.

“We saw the signs of fundamentalism start,” Aeberhard said. “The women began dressing differently, and men began dressing differently. I’d say that was the first exterior sign.” The quality of the local school declined, as did that of the local hospital.

“In Saint-Denis, there are about eighty different nationalities,” Aeberhard said. (Other estimates run higher.) “So it’s not a city of French—even poor French—origin any longer. It’s a cosmopolitan city. And cosmopolitan cities should be good!

I’m all for them!” He laughed. “But it’s a city with a lot of tension. Twenty-five per cent of the population doesn’t work. Thirty per cent of the population votes. You see, it’s a real problem. We didn’t know how to integrate the Maghrébins, who were mostly northern Algerian, who were French, who should have blended right in.”

Ten months ago, after the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher supermarket were attacked, more than a million and a half people marched through the center of Paris—the largest demonstration in the recent history of a country in which marches are the most vital expression of solidarity. But after last week’s violence, the police forbade Parisians from assembling in large groups for their own safety. Instead, people gathered quietly, singing songs and embracing strangers. At the attack sites, they laid candles and flowers and handwritten notes.

The question of how to react to the new round of terrorism went deeper than mere logistics. The *Charlie Hebdo* shootings had been widely understood as an assault on freedom of expression and French secularism; all over the country, people came together to proclaim their lack of fear. But now people were afraid. The journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* had known that they were terrorist targets, and had carried on their work at great personal risk. Last week’s victims were normal people doing normal Parisian things: eating and drinking together, going out at night to hear a concert or watch a soccer game. After a few days, the rhythm of Parisian life returned, but a new fatalism hung in the air. People seemed resigned to the idea that more attacks would happen, maybe soon.

Even before November 13th, the sense of unity established in January had begun to erode. The novelist and filmmaker Abdellah Taïa told me that, after *Charlie Hebdo*, “this question was here in my head suddenly: Am I going to spend my whole life in France?” It was Monday evening, and we were sitting at La Veilleuse, a café on the Boulevard de Belleville, a short walk from La Bonne Bière and Le Petit Cambodge. Aside from a couple of quick trips to pick up groceries, since Friday night he had been too afraid and depressed to leave his apartment. The afternoon before the shootings, he had gone to the public steambaths in the largely

Maghrébin neighborhood of Barbès, in the Eighteenth Arrondissement, and then returned home to watch the France-Germany match. He was asleep when a friend in Casablanca called him with the news.

Taïa was born in Rabat, Morocco, in 1973, and grew up in the city of Salé, the eighth of nine children. His family was poor, and spoke only Arabic at home. As a child, he dreamed of becoming a filmmaker, and he later pursued his studies with an eye to improving his French so that he could one day live in Paris. He arrived in the city at the age of twenty-five to work on his doctorate, at the Sorbonne, specializing in Jean-Honoré Fragonard, the eighteenth-century painter.

In terms of French cultural life, Taïa is at once an outsider and an insider. He finds the prospect of living in Morocco inconceivable—he is gay—but as a North African Muslim he feels the confines of French society, the narrowness of its cultural expectations. More young people have travelled from France to fight in Syria than from any other European country, and there is furious debate in France about the ways that the cultural separation of the *banlieues* may leave the young men who grow up there susceptible to recruitment by terrorist networks. Taïa was horrified by the terror, but sympathetic to the larger problem of isolation in the *banlieues*. “I relate to immigrants from the suburbs more and more,” he said.

I discussed the subject over dinner one night with my friend Sonia Ferhani, a doctoral candidate in English literature at the École Normale Supérieure. She was born in Algeria, a member of the Kabyle ethnic group, and immigrated to France with her parents in 1993, at the age of six. She understood Taïa’s view of the *banlieues’* isolation, but she stressed the importance of personal agency. “No one has to tell you, ‘Yeah, you’re French,’” she said.

She and her two brothers were raised in Pantin, a *banlieue* easily accessible to Paris by Métro. Her parents had taken her into the city all the time, but, she said, “people who lived right where I lived would never go to Paris.”

Sonia has had an elite French education—Catholic school, the prestigious Lycée Louis-le-Grand, the École Normale—and is quick to acknowledge that her path is unlike that of almost all her contemporaries from Pantin. “It’s not



perfect,” she said, of France. “But even if it’s cliché to say we’re the land of freedom, or that ‘*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*’ doesn’t mean anything—it does!” Her voice grew passionate. “My dad didn’t come to France just because he spoke the language. He could have gone to Switzerland, or Belgium. But he came here because he recognized himself in these values.”

Taïa, like many Muslims in France, had been offended by the implication that after *Charlie Hebdo* it was incumbent on him to prove that he was “a good Muslim”—an unthreatening, if not truly equal, member of French society. “I was angry after *Charlie Hebdo* about many things, including France,” he told me. The latest attacks had had a different effect: “Now I am *désespéré*”—despairing at the prospect of more terror.

A decade ago, one of Taïa’s nephews in Morocco had been radicalized, recruited on the street by a preacher of jihad. The boy’s father had taken his son to the police, but since no crime had been committed, he was released. After his mentor was arrested, the boy returned to a more normal life, though he was still far more religious than his parents or siblings.

Taïa’s nephew had been fifteen when he began to show signs of extremism. The entire family was baffled. “So young,” Taïa said. I noted that Friday’s attackers were all men in their twenties, and that they targeted places popular with people in the same age group. Taïa sipped his tea, thinking it over. “And they were brothers,” he said: the Abdeslams; the Kaouchis, who carried out the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre; and, in Boston, the Tsarnaevs. “I don’t know what it means, but it struck me.”

When I asked Taïa why he wanted to stay in France, despite all its difficulties, his eyes grew bright. “I want to stay here because the fight has meaning for me here,” he said. Through his writing, he could hope to push for change in French society in a way he could not in Morocco. “I always have the feeling that I am fighting *physically*,” he said. “It’s a real thing I’m doing.”

Taïa’s most recent novel was published the day after the *Charlie Hebdo* killings. “Un Pays pour Mourir”—“A Country to Die In”—tells the story of two North African prostitutes in Barbès, one of whom is a transgender woman. “They



“*Shaketh.*”

• •

are living in the heart of Paris, Barbès, and yet they don’t exist for France,” he said. He was thinking of writing a thriller next, about a Maghrébin serial killer.

“There is a real, catastrophic self-hatred in France,” Matthieu told me. We had been talking in his apartment for more than an hour. A friend was due at any minute, to drive him to Normandy; he needed to get away for a few days. Soon, he planned to leave Paris for good. Even before the attacks, he had become fed up with the city. He wanted to quit his job and move back to Bordeaux, where he grew up. His desire to go home surprised me—his parents had hardly been in contact since the news. His father had sent him a text message earlier that day; his mother e-mailed him while he was in the hospital to tell him that he should get sick leave.

Matthieu had his reasons for returning to Bordeaux. He recalled a line from Michel Houellebecq’s latest novel, “Submission,” in which the narrator decides to leave Paris for the southwest following the rise of a French Islamic party: “It was a region where they ate duck confit, and duck confit struck me as incompatible with civil war.” Matthieu smiled wryly. “It’s true that terrorism and the southwest are incompatible. Things move more slowly there. And the decadence of the provinces

is less advanced than it is in Paris, where it’s always on the cutting edge.”

I asked him what he meant by “decadence.”

“To me, ‘decadence’ is objective,” he said. “It’s not a value judgment. It’s the fact that France, bit by bit, doesn’t believe in anything in common anymore. Anyone could tell you that.” Regional elections were coming up in a few weeks, and, like many people, Matthieu was worried that the attacks would mean a major victory for Marine Le Pen, the leader of the extreme-right Front National, which could make her a formidable candidate in the 2017 Presidential election. “What I’m really afraid of is that either everyone will rally around the values of the Front National or there won’t be any rallying around anything.”

I remembered that when Matthieu and I first met we’d discussed our up-bringsings, and religion had come up. His family was Catholic, but I couldn’t remember if he was religious.

“I’m more agnostic than Catholic, though I come from the Catholic culture,” he said. “In any case, this isn’t really a moment when I’m thinking about religion. When I think about religion, I always think about it in connection with what’s beautiful, what’s good. But never in connection with evil. I just don’t see the connection.” ♦

# OUR BODIES, OURSELVES

*A funeral director wants to bring death back home.*

BY REBECCA MEAD

Caitlin Doughty, who was about to open her first funeral parlor, in Los Angeles, gazed at a skull that she had put on display above the desk in her office. Although it was plaster, the skull was a provocative presence in a room where Doughty planned to receive grieving families. It was mid-June, and that afternoon John Gettys, a field

chair, she looked like a noble in a memento-mori portrait. “I don’t want the state inspector to think I’m testing him,” she said. “Maybe I’ll put it on a lower shelf. That way, I will stay true to myself.” She checked her phone: Gettys was running late. “Maybe he died,” she said. “How funny would that be?”

Doughty’s office, which is in a med-

ier by David.” The bookshelf bears volumes of poetry, including Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass,” as well as a compendium of nineteenth-century funeral practices titled “The Victorian Book of the Dead.”

When Gettys finally arrived, Doughty rose to shake his hand. She is six feet one in ballet flats, and has pale skin, long mahogany hair with bangs, and a penchant for vintage dresses with nipped-in waists. (Today’s outfit was emerald green, which matched her eyes.) Gettys read through her price list, which offered a biodegradable willow casket for thirteen hundred and seventy dollars and, for a hundred and twenty dollars, a newborn’s casket made from recycled paper embedded with



*Caitlin Doughty, a funeral director, says, “Maybe we need to look and say, ‘Wow, let’s look at this beautiful, natural corpse.’”*

representative of the California Cemetery and Funeral Bureau, was coming to give the business a final inspection. Doughty, who is thirty, said, “I want the office to look like me, but I don’t want it to look *too* Arty Death Hipster.” This was possibly a futile hope. She grabbed the skull and sat contemplating it; in her vintage wooden swivel

ical building on the gritty end of Santa Monica Boulevard, has a view of the 101 from one window and a glimpse of the Scientology campus from the other. On one wall hangs a painting, by a high-school friend, of a coffin that has been bent in half and placed atop a chaise longue, in the manner of Magritte’s “Perspective: Madame Récam-

pressed flowers. Doughty considered her business an “alternative funeral service” that would bring mourners into closer contact with the dead by helping people to tend to corpses at home. She did not plan to offer embalming services, although she was qualified to do so, having graduated in 2010 from the mortuary-science program at Cypress



College. Regulations of funeral homes vary from state to state, and in California one can go into business without having taken a class in embalming, or even having learned how to securely close the eyes of a corpse. (A piece of cotton from the end of a Q-tip slipped under the eyelid usually does the trick.)

Doughty has a low, mellifluous voice and an ironical manner. “Are you going to give us a cool license number? Like, all the same digits?” she asked. Gettys, a middle-aged man whose pants and shirt were both of an olive hue, was not perceptibly amused, and replied that the number would be up to the bureau, in Sacramento. “We plan to be *massively* compliant,” Doughty told him. Her funeral parlor does not have its own crematory, so she and Gettys drove to examine the nearby facility that she planned to use. Gettys told her that, thirty years ago, he’d entered the business as an apprentice embalmer. “The funeral industry doesn’t change a lot—it’s been around for a long time,” he said. “Everybody tries to reinvent the wheel. Well, let me tell you something. The wheel has already been invented. O.K.—there are little permutations that can be done to the business model, but by and large the idea is to dispose of dead bodies.”

It was clear that Gettys was not aware of Doughty’s public profile—that he had not, for example, come across her popular series of online videos, “Ask a Mortician,” in which she fields such viewer questions as “Are these really my mother’s ashes?” and “What is the best way to write into my will that my children will receive no inheritance unless they have my dead body taxidermied and propped up in the corner of the living room?” In 2014, she published a best-selling memoir, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: And Other Lessons from the Crematory.” (“A girl always remembers the first corpse she shaves,” it begins.) And she is the founder of the Order of the Good Death, a mostly online meeting place for morticians and academics who are interested in exploring new ways to guide mourners through the experience of death.

A week after Gettys’s visit, Doughty posted on Twitter an image of an offi-

cial letter that she had received from Sacramento. It began with a cheery “Congratulations!” Doughty tweeted, “I am a funeral home owner. There can be miracles, if you believe.”

Doughty grew up in Hawaii, on the island of Oahu. When she was a teen-ager, she fantasized about opening a funeral home that would combine retro charm with up-to-date service. As she writes in her memoir, she even came up with a name for her imaginary establishment: La Belle Mort. She saw herself creating tailored events that celebrated the life of the deceased in a highly personalized manner: sending cremated ashes into space, or shooting them out of a gun, or compressing them into a gemstone.

After graduating from the University of Chicago, she worked for about two years at Pacific Interment, a mortuary and crematory in an industrial district of Oakland. Without ceremony, she processed corpses through preparation and incineration. This work changed her vision of the ideal funeral practice. “When I first thought I wanted to get into the industry, I thought people needed a more friendly death—for death to be more accessible,” Doughty told me. “That changed very quickly. Now I think people need to get closer to it. It should be up in your face, not ‘Let’s turn Mom into a diamond.’”

Her new funeral parlor has a blunt name: Undertaking L.A. Along with Amber Carvaly, her business partner, Doughty intends to help people take care of their own dead, rather than outsource the task to professionals. “When I found myself in all these big industrial warehouses, alone with all these bodies, I thought, *If I’m* doing all this, there are all these other people who *aren’t* doing this,” Doughty said. “That’s too much death for one person and not enough for all those other people.” Among the services offered by the fledgling company are help with home funerals, in which the body is bathed and dressed, then kept on ice for a few days, while the family grieves; natural burials, without casket or marker, at a green burial ground in Joshua Tree; and witness cremations, which permit family members to help load the body into the cremation machine

and push the button that starts the fire.

Sherwin B. Nuland, in his 1994 best-seller, “How We Die,” wrote, “Modern dying takes place in the modern hospital, where it can be hidden, cleansed of its organic blight, and finally packaged for modern burial.” Doughty’s goal is to end our deliberate estrangement from the dead body. “There really are so many places in our culture where we demand something unnatural,” she told me. “As of right now, what most people find acceptable is either no body at all or something that has been highly mediated. Someone comes in, they take the body away, and, the next time you see it, it has been disinfected and treated and made safe and beautiful.” A dead body is not immediately dangerous, except in cases such as Ebola, and in those instances infectious-disease protocols apply. “And maybe a dead body doesn’t need to be pretty,” Doughty went on. “Maybe we need to look and say, ‘Wow, let’s look at this beautiful, natural corpse.’” The conventional funeral industry has given people the impression that death is an emergency. “But death is *not* an emergency,” Doughty said. “Death is the opposite of an emergency. Look at the person who died—all that stress and pain is gone from them. And now that stress and pain can be gone from you.”

The professionalization of death care in America didn’t get under way until the second half of the nineteenth century. Modern embalming—in which the bodily fluids inside a corpse are drained, through an incision in a vein, and replaced with a preservative solution, through an incision in an artery—was popularized during the Civil War, as a means of allowing the bodies of fallen soldiers to last long enough for them to be shipped home for burial. Embalming became the signature skill of the professional mortician, setting his services apart from those of people—usually women—who had previously been responsible for preparing a dead body for the grave, by bathing it, anointing it, and dressing it, often in a shroud. In 1863, Louisa May Alcott, who served as a nurse during the Civil War, wrote of an encounter with the body of a soldier whom she had tended until death. “The lovely expression which so often beautifies dead faces,

soon replaced the marks of pain," Alcott wrote. "I longed for those who loved him best to see him when half an hour's acquaintance with Death had made them friends."

As Gary Laderman, a professor of religion at Emory University, explains in his 2005 book, *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*, the first embalmers made house calls. Early techniques were sometimes primitive: in 1898, an article in the *Journal of Medicine and Science* complained that the arsenic used to preserve corpses had leached into the soil and the groundwater near cemeteries. The article cited a critic of the practice—"Gallons of poisonous solutions are squirted into bodies indiscriminately"—and called for the establishing of standards in the handling of corpses. Around this time, the first mortuary schools were established, and the National Funeral Directors Association, which is still the leading industry association, was founded.

The turn of the twentieth century saw the emergence of the first funeral

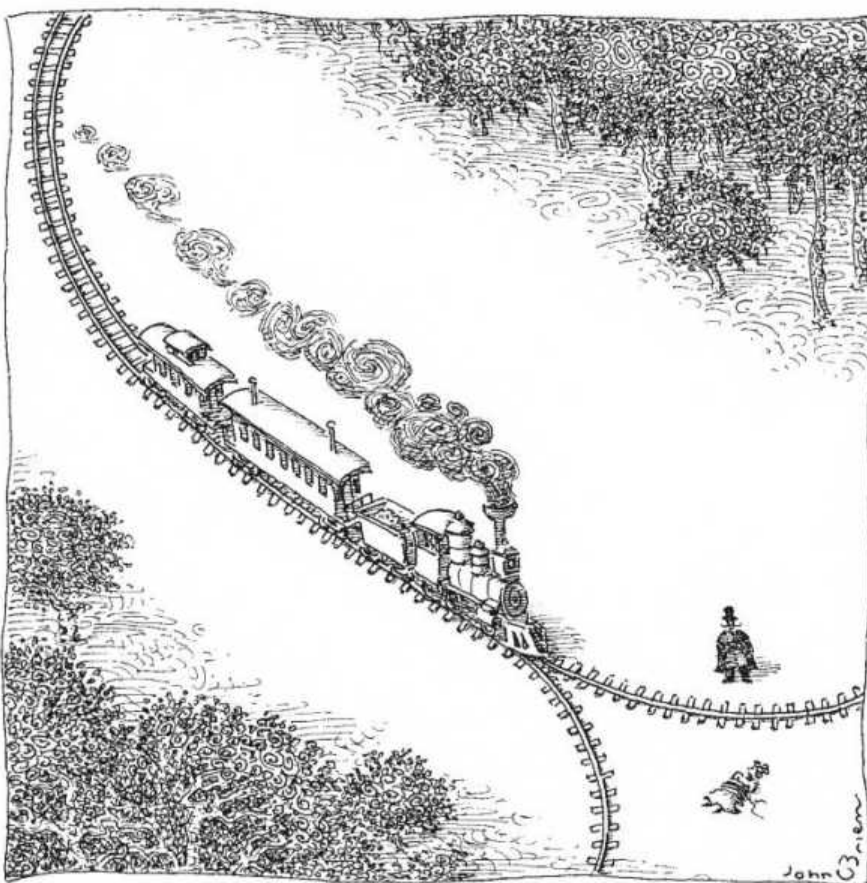
homes—literally the homes of professional morticians, who lived over their shops. It became the norm to remove a body from a home or a hospital as quickly as possible. The death industry boomed: a survey published in 1928 revealed that between 1900 and 1920 the number of funeral directors grew by more than fifty per cent. (The annual number of deaths increased by only 2.3 per cent in the same period.) For most of the twentieth century, the majority of funeral homes were family businesses that were passed from father to son—and rarely to a daughter. In the seventies, ninety-five per cent of funeral directors were men, and even by 1995 there were still almost twice as many male mortuary-science students as female ones.

Today, sixty-five per cent of mortuary-school graduates are women. The gender shift reflects a significant change in funeral practices. Rates of burial—and, hence, of embalming—have undergone a drastic decline. In 1960, fewer than four per cent of corpses were cremated. Today, the cremation rate is forty-five per cent. (Industry projec-

tions estimate that it will reach seventy per cent by 2030.) The image of the funeral director has undergone a parallel evolution. Although undertakers are still often portrayed as black-suited men in possession of dour scientific expertise, the funeral director has emerged as a member of the caring professions.

Until recently, it was common to believe that women were not physically capable of doing removals. Though such sexist fictions have been upended—lifting a dead body is mostly a matter of technique—explanations for the recent rise in women's "death work" are often no less dependent on restrictive stereotypes. Women in the industry often declare that they have an innate empathy for others, and that they excel at providing emotional support to the grieving. It's also argued that women are especially skilled at dressing the dead—and at restoring the appearance of vitality through the tasteful application of cosmetics and styling of hair. "People are more comfortable about crying, about showing emotion, in front of a woman," Erin Whitaker, a funeral director from South Carolina, told me. "And it's easier, as a woman, to put your hand on their hand as a sign of comfort."

With an increasing demand among baby boomers for customized funerals that reflect the individuality of the deceased, funeral directors are expanding into the business of event production. Today's funeral director might stage a memorial service featuring the release of butterflies at the grave site, or with the deceased's Harley parked ceremonially at the entrance to the chapel. In such instances, the skills of a funeral director can seem to fall somewhere between those of a nurse and a wedding planner. *Mortuary Management*, a trade magazine, offers articles about such innovations as the tribute blanket—an instant heirloom that incorporates photographs of the deceased into a custom-made tapestry—and urges funeral directors to be open-minded when faced with families who want pop songs played at a service. It's a profitable strategy to, as a feeble witicism of the industry has it, "put the fun back into funerals."





Since the nineteen-eighties, the National Funeral Directors Association has held an annual professional women's conference. This year, it took place in Chicago, and it attracted more than two hundred women from across the country. They attended an embalming workshop and listened to speakers who delivered "Lean In"-style exhortations.

Many women at the conference were helping to run, or had taken over, their family's funeral home, but there were also women who had been drawn to the work for other reasons. Patty Decker, of Woodstock, Georgia, who has been a funeral director for nearly thirty years, told me that she'd wanted to become one since she was eleven years old. "I just saw the respect that the funeral director in my home town had—how much he was admired," Decker said. "You have to love this job. You are faced with your own mortality every day. We are like the directors of this show that no one wants to attend." Maria Thomas, an apprentice embalmer in Virginia, had worked in the performing arts before starting her training. "The first time that a family threw their arms around me, thanking me for making their mom look so beautiful—that really touches something," she said. Strangers were curious about her job, she said, and she welcomed it. "We worship youth and beauty—those are the things that are celebrated in our culture," she said. "But we do have to accept that over here is the death corner, and you are not going to escape it. You might as well talk about it."

Doughty didn't attend the conference: she isn't a member of the National Funeral Directors Association, and notes grandly in her book that the group "won't comment on me." But some of the funeral directors present were aware of her advocacy of alternative funeral practices. One afternoon, there was a roundtable discussion of ways that funeral homes might use social media.

"Who is going to follow a funeral home's Twitter account, really?" one participant asked.

"Weirdos," someone replied.

"Competitors," added another.

Doughty's online prowess came up, and one participant remarked that she thought it was healthy for the public

to get a glimpse of a funeral director's reality. But another participant expressed concern about Doughty's perspective. "I feel like she's the one who's big on 'You don't need a funeral director,'" she said.

Affixed to the refrigerator in Doughty's apartment is a photograph of the class of 1973 at the California College of Mortuary Science, which later became part of Cypress College. Forty-four men, nearly all of them white, are dressed in black tie; there are two women in the class. Hanging next to that image is a 2010 photo of Doughty's class. Its thirty-one graduates form a racially diverse group, and twenty-two of them are women. At her new business, her colleagues are mostly female, too. "I don't think it's because we have some kind of helping gene—I don't think it's some deep need to nurture," she told me. "For me, working with dead bodies is almost like a feminist act. I don't want people to come in and say, 'Oh, no, little lady, you don't know what to do with this body,' because they already say that about our reproductive systems. *I know* I am qualified to take care of this body."

Many funeral directors like to say that they had a calling for the profession. Such statements are no doubt sincere, but it might also be convenient to characterize the career as having been thrust upon one: few people admit to being motivated by a deep interest in corpses and death. Doughty has no qualms in admitting to such a fascination. She says that she became "obsessed with death" in the nineties, while growing up as an only child in Kaneohe, on the east side of Oahu, where her father was a high-school teacher and her mother a real-estate agent. When Doughty was in grade school, she says, she witnessed a small girl tumbling from a height in a shopping mall. (Doughty presumes that the girl fell to her death, though she never found out for sure.) The incident made her conscious of her own mortality and that of everyone else. "Everybody has their moment when they realize that death is very real," she says.

Doughty studied medieval history at the University of Chicago, and she eventually focussed on the cultural status of the corpse and the representation of dead bodies in art and religious iconography. "I was interested in how much they had a relationship with the dead," she said. "If you went to a church in the Middle Ages, there would be bodies buried under the floor and in

the wall and in pits outside the church, and absolutely everywhere. The church was the center of life, so you would go there and have sermons and plays and outdoor markets. Everything you did—you were surrounded by corpses. Of course, they feared Hell—it's not like they were to-

tally comfortable with death—but they were a lot more comfortable with the dead body than we are now."

Upon graduation, in 2006, Doughty sought to convert her academic interest into real-world experience. At Pacific Interment, the Oakland crematory, she worked on bodies in the prep room and loaded them into the cremation machine. No special credentials were needed for the job, besides a tolerance for the brute facts of mortality. She gained intimate knowledge of the process of decomposition when it is unhindered by embalming: first comes a loosening of the skin, followed by bloating, putrefaction, and blackening. She chronicles her experiences in "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," which is filled with unflinching observations. ("The left side of her chest was caved in, giving the impression that someone had removed her heart in some elaborate ritual.") Doughty learned that it is difficult to arrange the deceased's facial features into a semblance of heavenly rest after rigor mortis sets in, a few hours postmortem. And she learned in what order corpses should be cremated when several must be processed in a single day. (Start with the heaviest decedent, when the cremation chamber is cold; if one waits until the chamber is hot, the body will burn too quickly, producing excessive smoke.)

For the most part, Doughty performed what is known as direct cremation, in which the body is removed



from a hospital or a home, then incinerated without ceremony, the desiccated remains mechanically processed into unidentifiable fragments that are collected and given to a relative. This is the least expensive way of dealing with death: in the U.S., the cost of a direct cremation averages between seven hundred and twelve hundred dollars, whereas an in-ground burial typically costs about seven thousand dollars. Cremation gained in popularity in America largely in response to consumer groups that, starting in the nineteen-sixties, publicly questioned the expensive services of the funeral industry.

In 1963, Jessica Mitford published "The American Way of Death," a scathing investigation into the practices of funeral directors. They were, she suggested, "merchants of a rather grubby order, preying on the grief, remorse, and guilt of survivors." Funeral directors lined their pockets, in part, by promoting questionable psychological arguments, such as the claim that the viewing of an embalmed corpse was a necessary step in the grieving process. They recommended "eternal sealer" caskets to protect the corpse from even greater ravages than death. Mitford championed cremation as a sensible alternative to burial, and her book, which became a best-seller, helped set in motion an investigation of the industry by the Federal Trade Commission. When Mitford died, in 1996, she was cremated, at Pacific Interment, for a cost of four hundred and seventy-five dollars. A decade later, Doughty took considerable satisfaction from the fact that she was operating the same machine in which Mitford had been reduced to ash.

Like Mitford, Doughty reviled the excesses of the funeral industry. But the longer she worked at Pacific Interment the more she found her own attitude toward the dead body at odds with Mitford's approach, which struck her as unsentimental to the point of callousness. Doughty began to think that Mitford's effort to combat the commercial excesses of the traditional funeral industry had ended up reducing the dead body to something to be dispensed with as cheaply and efficiently as possible. This approach swept aside

an important aspect of human experience: that of tending to loved ones in death, just as in life.

All Caring Cremations, the company that handles the burning of bodies for Undertaking L.A., is in a bleak industrial area in the San Fernando Valley. When Doughty took me there, she pointed out a building down the block that had served as the exterior of the Dunder Mifflin paper company, on the NBC show "The Office." "In an ideal world, this is not the neighborhood I would choose if we had the option to go with a wooded-stream crematory," Doughty said. "But that's not an option we have."

The lobby of All Caring was decorated with anonymous good taste: wing-back chairs, a low table. There was an unplaceable unpleasant aroma. A small chapel was painted in institutional beige, with chairs and a lectern and, up front, space for a casket. "They have said we could do some décor stuff in here—not, like, a feminine touch, but we might put up different art, a different color on the walls, better lighting," Doughty said. We heard a noise that I first took to be the loud rumble of the air-conditioning system; it was the sound of the cremation machine at work.

Doughty and Carvaly, her business partner, expect that many clients of Undertaking L.A. will seek out their services because of their advocacy of home funerals. For a fee of three hundred and forty dollars, Doughty and Carvaly will come to the home of a dying person and consult with the family about the best way to take care of the body in situ. (Opening windows can be useful, and so is planning to place the body on a bed or a couch that can be reached without climbing stairs.)

A person who helps families with a home funeral is often called a death midwife. (In most states, the services of a professional funeral director are not required by law.) Clients who like the idea of not handing off a loved one's body might not have the space or the stomach for caring for a corpse at home, and so a visit to All Caring's prep room—hidden behind a door marked "Employees Only"—is available. There they can help with bath-

ing and dressing the body, then proceed to the chapel and sit with the deceased in valediction.

Carvaly, who is also thirty, was a women's-studies major at college, and worked at a homeless shelter for women before enrolling at Cypress College's mortuary program, where she began corresponding with Doughty. She had aspired to be an embalmer, which she thought would combine science and art. But she was disillusioned after working briefly at Forest Lawn, the vast L.A. funeral complex that inspired Evelyn Waugh to write "The Loved One," his satirical 1948 novel. "Forest Lawn was very competitive," Carvaly told me, over lunch at the SteamPunk Café, not far from the crematory. "How many bodies can you do in a day? How quick and efficient are you? It's a business, and you *should* be able to do it quickly and efficiently. But I didn't like it." Undertaking L.A. is in the process of registering as a nonprofit.

Doughty and Carvaly do not expect their services to become mainstream choices. The notion that the dead body is a source of pollution is a deeply ingrained belief in many cultures. In Jewish law, a *kohen*, or priest, is not permitted to be under the same roof as a corpse (except in the case of close relatives). In Japanese tradition, undertakers belonged to the *burakumin*, society's lowest and most reviled caste.

It would be more commercially viable to embrace the trend of selling the funeral as a kind of farewell party. I recently spoke with an entrepreneurial funeral director named Paula Staab-Polk, from Chatham, Illinois. Having grown up in her family's funeral home, she struck out on her own a few years ago and decided to combine funeral and hospitality services. "The way I look at it is: our death is an event, and our life needs to be celebrated when we pass from this life to the next," Staab-Polk told me. A few years ago, she added a reception center to her funeral home. She has given a funeral luncheon that featured the favorite recipes of a woman who died at ninety-eight; she has held a service for a ten-year-old girl who died of cancer, at which guests were invited to "adopt" one of the many stuffed animals that had been sent to the sick child's bedside.



Staab-Polk offers floral services and bagpipers, and she also hosts non-funeral events. “I’ve got three high-school proms coming up,” she told me.

Doughty understands the appeal of Staab-Polk’s model. “People are afraid of death,” she said. “Do you want to go sit with the corpse or do you want to party? If you put it like that, it’s not a very hard question.” She is not denying that people can find great comfort in a personalized funeral ceremony. “But I would still argue that it doesn’t give you the full engagement with death and grieving that you need,” she says.

She is particularly skeptical of funerals that offer the bereaved a very brief look at an embalmed corpse. “If you are one of those people who, when you were eight, walked by a hyper-embalmed, preserved corpse, with the makeup and the suit, that quick glimpse in the casket can be scary, because there is no time to process it, and it stays with you, and the fear stays with you,” she told me. Spending time with a dead body in its natural state may be more challenging, she says, but it “normalizes” the experience. “When you talk about families that have worked with their dead body, and sat with their dead body, first they come in and just kind of touch the hand gently, like they are going to break Uncle Bob. Then, three or four hours later, they are telling jokes about Uncle Bob and giving him a hug.”

Doughty contends that elements of Undertaking L.A.’s approach can be applied to the most traditional of funerals. Carvaly recently participated in the funeral preparations for a friend named Marea Balvaneda, who had died suddenly, of cardiac arrest, at the age of thirty-six. “She had a traditional Catholic funeral, and she was embalmed,” Carvaly said. “The only thing that was different was that, the day before she was buried, I went to the funeral home with her sisters, and we dressed her body.”

At first, one of Balvaneda’s sisters, Ashley Wodke, lingered outside the prep room while the others worked. Carvaly told me, “It was, like, super-intuitive—they didn’t even need me.” Wodke said, “I knew I needed to do it, too. And it wasn’t as disturbing or traumatic as I thought it was going to be.”



*“Right now I’m his apostle, but my dream is to someday be my own Messiah.”*

Balvaneda was the oldest of five sisters and had always taken care of her younger siblings; Wodke said that she felt a responsibility to take care of her sister in return. “We made sure her last outfit, and her last application of makeup, was done right,” Wodke told me, her voice breaking. “We made sure she had the right red lipstick. She wore a very vibrant red—a stoplight red. If we hadn’t done it, it wouldn’t have been the right red.”

The death-care movement can be seen as echoing other attempts to celebrate the artisanal and reject the over-industrialized, over-sanitized, and over-medicalized way of life that prevailed in twentieth-century America. Home births, while still very much a minority choice, rose by more than fifty per cent between 2004 and 2012. The flourishing of farmers’ markets has supported local agriculture, and the eat-what-you-kill movement has emerged as an extreme critique of industrialized food. When Doughty adopts her exaggerated “Ask a Mortician” persona, it is so glibly morbid as to be almost a caricature of the Portland-Bushwick axis of cool. (In one episode, which ex-

plains that metal implants survive a cremation intact, she jokes, “My father has had to have both of his knees replaced, and if we decide to cremate him, guess what his beloved daughter will be keeping on her mantelpiece.”)

Doughty’s business is not, she insists, a hipster lark or a “vanity project.” She explained, “There’s no vanity in funeral service—you are in rooms with corpses all day. This is not to make ourselves look good. If you want to look good, you start a really rad Instagram account, or bake gluten-free cupcakes. You don’t cremate people.”

Undertaking L.A.’s support of home funerals is aligned with the death-with-dignity movement, which advocates for the right of the terminally ill to die at the time of their choosing. Doughty is on the advisory board of Compassion & Choices, a group that campaigns for right-to-die laws, and she believes that the way we treat the dead body in our culture has a great influence on the way we think about the care of an individual close to the end of life, be it our loved ones or ourselves.

Being afraid of the sight of a dead body is quite different from being afraid of dying, which is the province of the

confessional, the therapy suite, or the insomniac bedroom. But Doughty has found that spending time around dead bodies has helped her accept her own mortality. Working at a crematory led her to a realization: “O.K., this is going to be me—so this body is, so I shall be one day.” She explained, “If you have that opportunity with your family or community to come around the body, it is not only good to honor the dead person—they probably don’t really care—but it’s for you, too.”

In late June, Doughty took a road trip with her boyfriend, Landis Blair, to Crestone, a former mining town in Colorado. Doughty met Blair, an illustrator whose pen-and-ink drawings evoke the work of Edward Gorey, in 2012, after giving a lecture in Chicago. When she posted an item to her blog titled “My Morbid Art Crush on Landis Blair,” they struck up a relationship. They have lived together for a year, in an apartment filled with macabre Victoriana and the odd taxidermy specimen. Blair owns a unicycle that is usually propped up in a corner of the living room.

Blair is illustrating Doughty’s next book, a globally informed look at the future of death care, and he was serving as navigator. Crestone is about four hours south of Denver, and it is eight thousand feet above sea level, at the edge of a plain surrounded by mountains. Over the past several decades, Crestone, which at its most recent count had a population of a hundred and thirty-seven, has become the site of a wide variety of religious retreats. The landscape is thought to have a spiritual aura like that of the Himalayas. It is also home to an open-air funeral pyre, which was built by the Crestone End-of-Life Project, a small but avid group that champions natural funerals. Doughty was visiting it for the first time.

After arriving in town, we met up with Stephanie Gaines, the End-of-Life Project’s founder, and Paul Kloppenburg, a rugged Dutch expatriate who holds the title of fire-master. Kloppenburg told Doughty that the first open-air cremations in Crestone, in the early nineties, were conducted on a mobile pyre—a hundred cinder blocks and

a metal grate that could be set up on an individual’s property. “I would see the eagerness of the people,” he explained. “I would pull up with my truck and build the hearth, and let them have it.” But after the group received a letter of complaint from local residents it built a pyre four miles outside of town, on land belonging to a Buddhist center. To a metropolitan eye, the site is in the middle of nowhere, but Gaines reported that a neighbor a mile away was not happy about being downwind of it. “And people didn’t want the traffic,” she told Doughty. “Six cars is a lot of traffic around here.”

The plain was spectacular in its vastness, and snow-capped mountains rose craggily in the middle distance. The cremation site was strangely beautiful. There was a circular enclosure, about seventy-five feet in diameter, fenced with bamboo palings. Standing inside it, you had a sense of safety and intimacy, yet the grandeur of the wider landscape remained visible. Inside the fence were four teak benches; they were arranged around a ring of large stones that had been set into the dusty ground. At the center of the ring was the pyre: a structure, about as high as a workbench, consisting of an iron grate suspended between two thick walls of concrete. The grate sagged slightly in the middle, like a well-worn mattress.

Affixed to the pine posts that supported the bamboo enclosure were copper plaques with the names of the fifty or so people who had been cremated in Crestone. Some of them had moved there specifically to die; these included a woman with cervical cancer. Others had grown up in the area, among them a twenty-two-year-old man who’d died in a car accident.

The ceremonies take place around dawn, before the wind whips up. The body, wrapped in a shroud, is placed on the grate, and then family members with flaming torches ignite logs that have been placed underneath. The body is also overlaid with logs and fragrant juniper branches, so that onlookers see only flame, not the body as it incinerates. For the first quarter of an hour, there is usually silence among the onlookers as the flames roar; as the fire matures, people chant, pray, beat drums, sing songs. It takes about two and a

half hours for the body to be reduced to ash—hardly longer than a conventional cremation, Doughty noted with surprise. Gaines told her that mourners “say they are never the same after this.”

That afternoon, we had tea at the mountainside cabin where Gaines lives. She explained to Doughty that in Crestone a body is given a three-day period of repose before it is burned on the pyre: chilled gel packs help keep the body fresh, and the corpse is placed on a wooden pallet, obviating the need to lift it from a bed or a couch several days after death. Doughty talked about a recent trip that she had taken to Japan, where she’d visited a corpse hotel, which allows families with apartments too tiny for a home funeral to participate in the ritual preparation of a body. She liked the idea of setting up something similar with Undertaking L.A. “What I am really interested in is asking whether it is possible to have a communal center,” she said. “Family comes from out of town and it’s, like, a three-day wonderland process.”

Gaines, who is in her seventies, had a radiant air of calm. She explained that she was a devout spiritual practitioner: a contemplative with a special interest in the Gnostic traditions. Many of the other members of the Crestone End-of-Life Project had similar inclinations, but, Gaines explained, anyone was welcome to participate in the community of care, which embraced both the deceased and their survivors. “You want everyone to have this opportunity, because it is so filled with grace, and such an opening,” she said. “It is so transformational for everybody—not just for the person who died.”

Doughty nodded. “I am pretty secular, but the transformation from body to ash is still incredibly meaningful to me,” she said. “I may not think the soul is necessarily going anywhere—but just the physical transformation and the transformation of the mourners *are* transitions. It is ritual, and it is very real, and it is important, no matter what ideas of the body and the soul and the spirit the family comes in with.” She petted Gaines’s cat, which was moving promiscuously from lap to lap, sparing nobody. “It’s an exciting time to be in death,” Doughty said. ♦



# G.P.S. DIRECTIONS FOR GETTING HOME DRUNK

BY HALLIE CANTOR



**E**xit the party and *stumble down-stairs*, toward the street.

After realizing that the friend with whom you'd planned to split an Uber is no longer following you, *make a U-turn* and *proceed back into* the party.

*In ten feet*, your friend will be on your right, flirting with a guy whom she once spent an entire workday direct-messaging on Twitter in an attempt to get him to ask her out.

To avoid cock-blocking her, *make another U-turn*.

*In twenty feet*, a cluster of smokers, including the party's host, will be on your right. You will recognize a few of them, but you will not feel like saying goodbye to more people, so *continue walking* with your head down, as though you're looking at your phone, because if your head is down you are invisible, and are therefore not being rude.

*As you exit*, hold your jacket instead of putting it on, because you are warm from alcohol and too lazy to do all that complicated stuff with your arms. *In*

*eight hours*, you will have the beginnings of a terrible head cold.

*Begin walking* in the general direction in which you feel the subway station may be situated.

*In one hundred feet*, realize that this may not be the correct direction. Pull your phone out to look up a map.

*Make a slight detour* to woozily scroll through Twitter for five minutes, while standing in the middle of the sidewalk. Forget why you took your phone out in the first place. *Continue walking*.

Depending on traffic, *yield* to crowds of other drunk people making their way home. They are different from you, in tighter skirts and higher heels, but in another sense they are the same. You're all just trying to squeeze as much experience out of your youth as possible. In a sense, you're all just sailors on the sea of—oh, one of them is throwing up. *Veer right*.

Next, *make a sharp turn* from feeling pleasantly tipsy to feeling dizzy and nauseated. Admonish yourself for

literally poisoning your body. Anticipate the hangover you will have tomorrow. Wonder if you have a hangover right now, somehow?

*In five hundred feet*, turn left into a bodega and *proceed to wander around* for ten to twelve minutes while clutching a package of Hostess cupcakes and a fig-based energy bar, trying to decide if these are the absolute best snacks to buy, or if sriracha-flavored potato chips would taste better.

*Pause* to make prolonged eye contact with a bodega cat. Really feel a connection with the animal.

*Signal* to the bodega clerk that you aren't like those other annoying drunk customers by acting really professional and bored with your transaction. For some reason, it is very important that he not think you are drunk, even though you are drunk and he is a complete stranger.

*As you exit the bodega*, arrive at the realization that you still have no idea where you're going. Open the Uber app on your phone, then remember all those articles you considered reading about how the sharing economy is terrible for workers and *reverse course*.

*Recalculating*.

Are you drunk enough to justify a cab? *Mentally retrace your steps* to figure out how many drinks you had. Then try to remember that rhyme about beer before liquor. Is it something about red and black not being mellow? Or is that the one about snakes?

Once you figure out you had *that* many drinks, vaguely wonder if you did anything embarrassing at the party, fully aware that you're still too drunk to gauge what constitutes embarrassing behavior. *Enter an endless loop* of anxiety. Was it rude that you didn't say goodbye to the host? Was she mad at you? Was it because you spilled your Aperol spritz on her white couch while doing an interpretive dance to the new Adele song? Was it because she didn't see that you brought beer, so she thought that you were mooching off her generosity?

*Exit this roundabout* thought pattern by planning which TV shows you're going to stream when you get home.

*In one minute*, hail a cab. Keep the windows open. ♦

## INFLAMED

*The debate over the latest cure-all craze.*

BY JEROME GROOPMAN



Several years ago, I fell at the gym and ripped two tendons in my wrist. The pain was excruciating, and within minutes my hand had swollen grotesquely and become hot to the touch. I was reminded of a patient I'd seen early in medical school, whose bacterial infection extended from his knee to his toes. Latin was long absent from the teaching curriculum, but, as my instructor examined the leg, he cited the four classic symptoms of inflammation articulated by the Roman medical writer Celsus in the first century: *rubor*, redness; *tumor*, swelling; *calor*, heat; and *dolor*, pain. In Latin, *inflammatio* means "setting on fire," and as I considered the searing pain in my in-

jured hand I understood how the condition earned its name.

Inflammation occurs when the body rallies to defend itself against invading microbes or to heal damaged tissue. The walls of the capillaries dilate and grow more porous, enabling white blood cells to flood the damaged site. As blood flows in and fluid leaks out, the region swells, which can put pressure on surrounding nerves, causing pain; inflammatory molecules may also activate pain fibres. The heat most likely results from the increase in blood flow.

The key white blood cell in inflammation is called a macrophage, and for decades it has been a subject of study in

my hematology laboratory and in many others. Macrophages were once cast as humble handmaidens of the immune system, responsible for recognizing microbes or debris and gobbling them up. But in recent years researchers have come to understand that macrophages are able to assemble, within themselves, specialized platforms that pump out the dozens of molecules that promote inflammation. These platforms, called inflammasomes, are like pop-up factories—quickly assembled when needed and quickly dismantled when the crisis has passed.

For centuries, scientists have debated whether inflammation is good or bad for us. Now we believe that it's both: too little, and microbes fester and spread in the body, or wounds fail to heal; too much, and nearby healthy tissue can be degraded or destroyed. The fire of inflammation must be tightly controlled—turned on at the right moment and, just as critically, turned off. Lately, however, several lines of research have revealed that low-level inflammation can simmer quietly in the body, in the absence of overt trauma or infection, with profound implications for our health. Using advanced technologies, scientists have discovered that heart attacks, diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease may be linked to smoldering inflammation, and some researchers have even speculated about its role in psychiatric conditions.

As a result, understanding and controlling inflammation has become a central goal of modern medical investigation. The internal research arm of the National Institutes of Health recently designated inflammation a priority, mobilizing several hundred scientists and hundreds of millions of dollars to better define its role in health and disease; in 2013, the journal *Science* devoted an entire issue to the subject. This explosion in activity has captured the public imagination. In best-selling books and on television and radio talk shows, threads of research are woven into cure-all tales in which inflammation is responsible for nearly every malady, and its defeat is the secret to health and longevity. New diets will counter the inflammation simmering in your gut and restore your mental equilibrium. Anti-inflammatory supplements will lift your depression and ameliorate autism. Certain drugs will tamp down the silent inflammation that degrades

*The National Institutes of Health recently designated inflammation a priority.*



your tissues, improving your health and extending your life. Everything, and everyone, is inflamed.

Such claims aside, there is genuine evidence that inflammation plays a role in certain health conditions. In atherosclerosis, blood flow to the heart or the brain is blocked, resulting in a heart attack or a stroke. For a long time, atherosclerosis was thought to result mainly from eating fatty foods, which clogged the arteries. "Atherosclerosis was all about fats and grease," Peter Libby, a professor at Harvard Medical School and a cardiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, in Boston, told me recently. "Most physicians saw atherosclerosis as a straight plumbing problem."

During his cardiology training, Libby studied immunology, and he became fascinated with the work of Rudolf Virchow, a nineteenth-century German pathologist. Virchow speculated that atherosclerosis might be an active process, caused by inflamed blood vessels, not one caused simply by the accumulation of fat. In the mid-nineteen-nineties, in studies with mice, Libby, working in parallel with other groups of scientists, found that low-density lipoproteins—LDLs, those particles of "bad" cholesterol—can work their way into the lining of arteries. There, they sometimes trigger an inflammatory response, which can cause blood clots that block the artery. Libby and others began to understand that atherosclerosis wasn't a mere plumbing problem but also an immune disease—"our body's defenses turned against ourselves," he told me.

Paul Ridker, a cardiovascular expert and a colleague of Libby's at Harvard and Brigham and Women's, moved the research beyond the laboratory. He found that many patients who'd had heart attacks, despite lacking factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and a history of smoking, had an elevated level of C-reactive protein, a molecule produced in response to inflammation, in their blood. After demonstrating, in a separate study, that cholesterol-reducing statins could also reduce C-reactive-protein levels, Ridker launched the Jupiter trial, in which people with elevated levels of C-reactive protein but normal cholesterol levels were given a placebo or a statin medication. In 2008, the published results showed that

the subjects who received the statin saw their levels of C-reactive protein drop and were less likely three and a half years later to suffer a heart attack. This suggested that elevated cholesterol isn't the only factor at work in cardiovascular disease, and that in some cases statins, acting as anti-inflammatory agents, could be used to treat the condition.

The benefit was modest: the statin treatment reduced the risk of heart attack in only about one per cent of the patients. Still, that figure is statistically significant, and for one in every hundred patients—a hundred in every ten thousand—it's meaningful. An independent safety-monitoring board ended the study early, saying that it was unethical to continue once it was clear that statins provided a benefit not available to the subjects on the placebo. (Critics argue that shortening the trial, which was funded by a drug company, exaggerated the potential benefits and underestimated long-term harm, but the researchers strongly disagree.) The N.I.H. and other scientific groups are funding new studies to further explore whether anti-inflammatory drugs—for example, low doses of immunomodulatory agents that are used for treating severe arthritis—can help prevent cardiovascular disease.

Another chronic condition that has been linked to inflammation is Type II diabetes. People with this condition can't adequately use insulin, a molecule that enables the body's cells to take glucose out of the bloodstream and derive energy from it. Their organs fail and glucose builds to dangerous levels in the blood. Recently, researchers have found macrophages in the pancreases of people with Type II diabetes. The macrophages release inflammatory molecules that are thought to impair insulin activity. One of these inflammatory molecules is called interleukin-1, and in 2007 the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported on a clinical trial in which an interleukin-1 blocker proved to be modestly effective at lowering blood-sugar levels in Type II diabetics. This suggests that, by blocking inflammation, it might be possible to restore insulin activity and alleviate some of the symptoms of diabetes.

Alzheimer's disease, too, seems to show a link to inflammation. Alzheimer's results from the buildup of amyloid and tau proteins in the brain; spe-

cialized cells called glial cells, which are related to macrophages, recognize these proteins as debris and release inflammatory molecules to get rid of them. This inflammation is thought to further impair the working of neurons, worsening Alzheimer's. The connection is tantalizing, but it's important to note that it doesn't mean that inflammation causes Alzheimer's. Nor is there strong evidence that inflammation contributes to other forms of dementia where the brain isn't filled with protein debris. And in clinical trials anti-inflammatory drugs like naproxen and ibuprofen have failed to ameliorate or prevent Alzheimer's.

On September 18, 2015, scientists at the N.I.H. convened a meeting to publicly present their research priorities, one of which is to decipher the consequences of inflammation. It's increasingly apparent that inflammation plays some role in many health conditions, but scientists are far from grasping the nature of that relationship, the mechanisms involved, or the extent to which treating inflammation is helpful.

"We really don't know how much inflammation contributes to diabetes, Alzheimer's, depression, and other disorders," Michael Gottesman, a director of research at the N.I.H., told me. "We know a lot about the mouse and its immune response. Much, much less is understood in humans. As we learn more, we see how much more we need to learn." Gottesman pointed out that, of the thousand or so proteins circulating in our bloodstream, about a third are involved in inflammation and in our immune response, so simply detecting their presence doesn't reveal much about their potential involvement in any particular disease. "Correlation is not causation," he emphasized. "Because you find an inflammatory protein in a certain disorder, it doesn't mean that it is causing that disorder."

This lack of certainty hasn't dampened the enthusiasm of a growing number of doctors who believe that inflammation is the source of a wide range of conditions, including dementia, depression, autism, A.D.H.D., and even aging. One of the most prominent such voices is that of Mark Hyman, whose books—including "The Blood Sugar Solution 10-Day Detox Diet"—are best-sellers. Hyman serves as a personal health adviser

to Bill and Hillary Clinton and to the King and Queen of Jordan. Recently, he was recruited by the Cleveland Clinic with millions of dollars in funding to establish a center based on his ideas. Trained in family medicine, Hyman told me that he considers himself a new type of doctor. “I am a doctor who treats root causes and addresses the body as a dynamic system,” he wrote in an e-mail. “Being an inflammologist is part of that.”

Studies with human subjects clearly indicate that, in cases where inflammation underlies a chronic condition, the inflammation is local: in the arteries (heart disease); or in the brain (Alzheimer’s); or in the pancreas (diabetes). And though there are associations between various forms of inflammatory disease—for example, people with psoriasis or periodontal disease have a somewhat higher risk of heart disease—it has not been proved that there is a causal connection. Hyman and other doctors, such as the neurologist David Perlmutter, promote a more radical idea: that certain foods and environmental toxins cause smoldering inflammation, which somehow spreads to other areas of the body, including the brain, degrading one’s health, mental acuity, and life span.

The notion of a gut-brain connection seems to derive from studies with mice, including one that showed that introducing a bacterium into a mouse’s gastrointestinal tract led to behavioral changes, such as a reluctance to navigate mazes. But there’s scant evidence that anything similar happens in people, or any rigorous study to show that “anti-inflammatory diets” reduce depression. Earlier this year, the journal *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* published a meta-analysis of more than fifty clinical studies that found inflammatory molecules in patients with depression. The paper revealed that there was little consistency from study to study about which molecules correlated to the condition. Steven Hyman, a former director of the National Institute of Mental Health and now the head of the Stanley Center at the Broad Institute (and no relation to Mark Hyman), in Cambridge, Massachusetts, noted that depression is “one of those topics where exuberant

theorization vastly outstrips the data.”

Nonetheless, Mark Hyman holds fast to his view. “Inflammation is the final common pathway for pretty much all chronic diseases,” he told me. His recommended solution is an “anti-inflammatory diet”—omitting sugar, caffeine, beans, dairy, gluten, and processed foods, as well as taking a variety of supplements, including probiotics, fish oil, Vitamins C and D, and curcumin, a key molecule in turmeric. Hyman introduced me to one of the patients he had treated with his anti-inflammatory diet and supplements, a forty-seven-year-old hedge-fund manager in Cambridge named Jim Silverman. Two decades ago, Silverman began noticing blood in his stool. A colonoscopy resulted in a diagnosis of ulcerative colitis. In the ensuing years, Silverman was treated by gastroenterologists with aspirin-based medication, anti-inflammatory suppositories, and even corticosteroids, but the problem persisted. Then, five years ago, on a flight home from a business conference, he happened to sit next to Hyman, who told him that he could cure colitis.

“I thought, What a bullshitter,” Silverman said. He travelled anyway to Hyman’s UltraWellness Center, in Lenox, Massachusetts, to consult with him. Hyman told him that dairy was inflaming his bowel. Silverman was skeptical, but he kept track of his diet and bleeding episodes, and ultimately concluded that restricting dairy products resulted in long periods without bleeding. He now thinks that he could be suffering

from a dairy allergy. In addition to avoiding dairy products, he continues to follow the anti-inflammatory regimen of supplements prescribed by Hyman. “I’m just taking it because I’m doing well,” he said. “I have no idea if it’s doing anything, but I don’t want to rock the boat.”

I asked Gary Wu, a professor of gastroenterology at the Perelman School of Medicine, at the University of Pennsylvania, and one of the world’s experts on the gut microbiome, about the alleged value of treating inflammatory bowel disease by restricting specific foods. Recently, in the journal *Gastroenterology*, Wu and his colleagues published a comprehensive review of scientific studies on diet and inflammatory

bowel disease. They found only two dietary interventions that had been proved to reduce inflammation: an “elemental diet,” which is a liquid mixture of amino acids, simple sugars, and triglycerides, and a slightly more complex liquid diet. The liquid mixtures are typically administered with a tube placed through the nose. “The diet is not palatable,” Wu said. “And you don’t eat during the day. There is no intake of whole foods at all.”

David Agus, a cancer specialist and a professor of medicine and engineering at the University of Southern California, is equally skeptical of Hyman’s claims for the anti-inflammation diet. Agus, who is perhaps best known for being the doctor on “CBS This Morning,” recently received a multimillion-dollar grant from the National Cancer Institute to study how inflammation may spur the growth of tumors. “This notion that foods cause inflammation and foods can block inflammation, there’s zero data that it changes clinical outcomes,” he told me. “If the idea gets people to eat fruits and vegetables, I love it, but it’s not real.” Agus noted that vitamins don’t counter inflammation, and that it’s been shown, in rigorous clinical trials, that they may increase one’s risk of developing cancer.

Still, Agus views inflammation as a component not only of cancer but also of chronic diseases like diabetes and dementia. Rather than special diets, he supports preventively taking approved anti-inflammatory medications, such as aspirin and statins, and scrupulously scheduling the standard vaccinations in order to prevent infections. In “The End of Illness,” Agus encourages the reader to “reduce your daily dose of inflammation” by, among other things, not wearing high heels, since these can inflame your feet and the inflammation could possibly affect your vital organs. When I pressed him on that suggestion, he told me, “What I meant is that if your feet hurt all day it’s probably not a good thing. The downside is you just wear a different pair of shoes. The upside is it gave you an understanding of inflammation and its role in disease.”

Mark Hyman, at times, acknowledges the possible limits of his paradigm. When I asked him about the alleged link among gut inflammation, diet, and psychological disorders, he conceded that some of his evidence was anecdotal, derived from his





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own clinical practice. He mentioned the case of a child with asthma, eczema, and A.D.H.D., whom he treated with “an elimination diet, taking him off processed foods, and giving him supplements.” The child’s allergic problems improved and his behavior was markedly better, Hyman said: “It was a light-bulb moment. I saw secondary effects on the brain that came out of treating physical problems.”

He also cited studies of patients with rheumatoid arthritis, a painful and debilitating auto-immune condition that inflames and erodes the joints, who became less depressed after being treated with inflammatory blockers. But had the anti-inflammatory treatment directly lifted their depression, or had their mood improved simply because they were more mobile and in less pain? I told Hyman that it was hard to connect the dots. “For sure,” he said.

Connecting the dots is a challenge even for scientists who are actively involved in inflammation research. One afternoon, I visited Ramnik Xavier, the chair of gastroenterology at Massachusetts General Hospital and an expert in Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis. The bowel is inflamed in both conditions: ulcerative colitis affects the colon, whereas Crohn’s disease can affect any part of the digestive system. But the nature of inflammation varies almost from person to person and involves interactions among DNA, many kinds of gastrointestinal cells, and the peculiarities of the gut microbiome. “Lots of cells, lots of genes, lots of bugs,” Xavier said.

Xavier, a compact man with a laconic manner and thick black hair marked by streaks of gray, initially studied the role of specialized white blood cells, known as T-cells and B-cells, in defending the body against the development of colitis. Eventually, with Mark Daly, a geneticist at the Broad Institute, Xavier began to search for genes that predispose people to inflammatory bowel disease and for genes that might protect them against it. The two scientists, as part of an international consortium, have identified at least a hundred and sixty areas of DNA that are associated with an increased risk of inflammatory bowel disease; Xavier’s lab has zeroed in on about two dozen genes within these regions of DNA.

One of the frustrations of treating

inflammation is that our weapons against it are so imprecise. Drugs like naproxen and ibuprofen are the equivalent of peashooters. At the other extreme, cannon-like steroids shut down the immune system, raising the risk of infection, eroding the bones, predisposing the patient to diabetes, and causing mood swings. Even the peashooters can cause collateral damage: aspirin may help to protect against colon cancer, heart attack, and stroke, but it also raises the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. Ibuprofen, naproxen, and similar drugs were labelled by the F.D.A. as increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke in people who’ve never suffered either condition, and clinical trials failed to show that they prevent or ameliorate dementia. (Although these drugs reduce inflammation, they may also alter the lining of blood vessels and increase the risk of clots.) Statins lower the chance of a heart attack, but there is growing concern not only about the side effect of muscle pain but also about increasing the likelihood of diabetes. And the absolute benefits of these preventive medications is slight, measured in single digits.

In the lab at the Broad Institute, Xavier and his team were trying to discover new treatments that can block inflammation

in a targeted manner. The day I visited, they were assessing molecules associated with colitis, especially one called interleukin-10, or IL-10, which is known to decrease inflammation. In a cavernous room, I watched as a robotic arm moved among racks of plastic plates, each containing hundreds of small wells in which chemical compounds were being tested. Some people with Crohn’s disease have genetic mutations that disable the salubrious effects of IL-10. Xavier is trying to identify molecules that can compensate for this deficiency, in the hope that such molecules might eventually be turned into drugs to treat this subset of patients.

But other patients suffer from a different manifestation of Crohn’s—they can’t fully clear debris from cells in their gut, so it builds up, triggering inflammation. In a neighboring lab, members of Xavier’s research team were trying to develop drugs for that condition, too. A robotic arm was handling plates that contained genetically engineered cells and moving them under a fluorescent microscope. The images appeared on a computer screen—fields of cells studded with yellow and green dots, like the sky in van Gogh’s “Starry Night.”

On another visit, Xavier took me to

## MAJOR TO MINOR

Trains jump tracks,  
and people from

steep trestles leap.  
But mostly it’s

the subtler shifts  
that hit us hard:

the key to the city  
not quite fitting, the

epiphany of twin  
beds where there

was one—like two  
icebergs no July

knows what  
to do with.

—*Andrea Cohen*



his clinic at Mass General. Patients, ranging from the very young to the elderly, were reclining in Barcaloungers as nurses and physicians intravenously administered potent anti-inflammatory drugs. Later, I spoke by phone to one of Xavier's patients, a forty-nine-year-old woman named Maria Ray, who received a diagnosis of colitis in 1998. She was treated with sulfa drugs and corticosteroids, which controlled the problem for several years, but in 2004, after a series of flare-ups, she underwent surgery to remove her colon. Soon after, she developed ulcers on her skin, arthritis of her knees and elbows, and inflammation in both eyes. Xavier prescribed other drugs, and for two years her condition improved, but lately her skin lesions and eye inflammation have returned. "We hoped surgery would cure her ulcerative colitis," Xavier said. "But we don't really understand why there is such an overactive immune system now inflaming these other parts of her body."

At the very least, the fact that Ray has symptoms in many organs, despite the removal of her colon, complicates the simplistic view that treating the gut will suppress inflammation elsewhere. Moreover, there's no evidence that patients with Crohn's or colitis are more likely than average to develop dementia and other cognitive disorders. "What we see in mice is not always reproduced in people," Xavier said.

Perhaps no aspect of inflammation is more compelling, or illusory, than the idea that it may be responsible for aging. An internist friend in Manhattan told me that healthy patients occasionally come in to her office carrying Mark Hyman's books, eager to live longer by following his anti-inflammation life style. When I asked Hyman if he could introduce me to someone who follows his longevity regimen, he readily offered himself. "I'm aiming to live to a hundred and twenty," he said.

The notion stems from grains of evidence, such as studies that have shown an increase in inflammation with age. The genesis of aging is still a mystery. It may occur for a host of reasons—a waning of the energy generated by the mitochondria within cells, the tendency of DNA to grow fragile and more mutation-prone over time—and it's much too

simplistic to attribute the process to inflammation alone. Luigi Ferrucci, the scientific director of the National Institute on Aging, conducted some of the early research on inflammation and aging, and for a while, he told me, he believed the avenue held promise. On the morning we spoke, he had just finished his daily six-mile run. Sixty-one years old, born in Livorno, on the coast of Tuscany, Ferrucci is an animated man with a stubbly beard who favors crew-neck sweaters. In the past four decades, he has studied thousands of people in order to identify the biological processes that result in aging. He measured scores of molecules in the blood, hoping to find clues that would lead him to the cause of aging's hallmarks, particularly sarcopenia, or loss of muscle mass, and cognitive decline.

His most illuminating studies involved people in late middle age who showed no sign of heart disease, diabetes, dementia, or other conditions that might be associated with inflammation. He found that a single inflammatory molecule, called interleukin-6, was the most powerful predictor of who would eventually become disabled. Healthy patients with high levels of the IL-6 molecule aged more quickly and grew sicker than those without the inflammatory molecule. "I thought I had discovered the cause of aging and was going to win the Nobel Prize," Ferrucci said, laughing.

But then he found other subjects with no evidence of inflammation, and without elevated levels of IL-6 or other inflammatory molecules, whose bodies nevertheless began to decline. "We are looking at the layer, not at the core of the problem," he said. "Inflammation may accelerate aging in some people—but it is a manifestation of something that is occurring underneath." He reiterated the point that correlation is not causation. "If you have the curiosity of the scientist, you can't stop there, because you want to know why," he said. "You want to break the toy so you can see how it's working inside."

Toward that end, Ferrucci recently organized a large team of collaborators and launched a new clinical study, GESTALT, which stands for Genetic and Epigenetic Signatures of Translational Aging Laboratory Testing. Groups of healthy people will be studied intensively as they age, with detailed analyses of their DNA, RNA, proteins, metabolic capacity, and other so-

phisticated parameters, every two years for at least a decade. "Then we can say what mechanisms account for increased inflammation with aging, and the loss of muscle mass, or the loss of memory, or the loss of energy capacity or fitness," Ferrucci said. "These have never really been addressed on a deep level in humans."

In the meantime, he sticks to a Mediterranean diet, mainly out of fealty to his heritage. (Ferrucci is known among his N.I.H. colleagues as a gourmet Italian cook.) The media recently gave much attention to a study, published in 2013 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, on the benefits of a Mediterranean diet in preventing heart attack or stroke. But, as Ferrucci noted, the benefits weren't clearly related to inflammation and they accrued to a very small percentage of the subjects on the diet. "Believe me, if there were a diet that prevented aging, I would be on it," he said.

We'd all like a simple solution for complex medical problems. We're desperate to feel in command of our lives, particularly as we age and see friends and family afflicted by Alzheimer's, stroke, and heart failure. "My patients, understandably, are very focussed on the foods they eat, wanting control, hoping they won't have to take immune-suppressive treatments," Gary Wu, the University of Pennsylvania gastroenterologist, told me.

Some years ago, I became obsessed with a restrictive diet—no bread, cheese, ice cream, cookies—in an attempt to lower my cholesterol levels. (My father died of a heart attack in his fifties, and I was haunted by his fate.) After nearly six months, I'd lost some fifteen pounds, but my cholesterol level had hardly budged, and I'd become so vigilant about everything I ate that I stopped enjoying meals. Gradually, I resumed a balanced and more reasonable diet and regained an appreciation for one of life's fundamental pleasures.

Scientists may yet discover that inflammation contributes to disease in unexpected ways. But it's important to remember, too, that inflammation serves a vital role in the body. "We are playing with one of the primary mechanisms selected by nature to maintain the integrity of our body against the thousand environmental attacks that we receive every day," Ferrucci said. "Inflammation is part of our maintenance and repair system. Without it, we can't heal." ♦





*"This notion that somehow to be compassionate you have to be lawless is something I don't buy, and I think most Hispanics don't buy*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PETERSON



## THE OPPORTUNIST

*Marco Rubio's political dexterity.*

BY EVAN OSNOS

On the morning of October 10th, Marco Rubio, Florida's junior senator, mounted a small stage at the Elks Lodge in Boulder City, Nevada, a popular retirement spot near Las Vegas. In his twenties, as an obscure Republican state legislator, Rubio exhibited such innate political skill that Dan Gelber, the Democratic leader of the Florida House, warned his colleagues, "When Marco Rubio speaks, young women swoon, old women faint, and toilets flush themselves." Now that he was a Presidential candidate, Rubio was trying to speak to as many different audiences as possible. The Elks Lodge was decorated modestly, with just a few campaign banners hoisted amid the taxidermy—a demonstration of thrift intended to contrast with the front-runner for the Republican Presidential nomination, the billionaire Donald Trump, and to counter claims that Rubio occasionally spends more money than he should.

The attendees were predominantly older white couples, who were seeing Rubio in person for the first time. The son of Cuban immigrants, he grew up mostly in Miami, but he lived in Las Vegas from 1979 until 1985, when he left, after eighth grade. "I love coming back to southern Nevada, because it's a place where I actually learned so much about the American Dream," he said. "My father was a bartender at Sam's Town—an Old West-style casino, seven miles off the Strip. "My mother was a maid at what was then called the Imperial Palace." He went on, "They used to have a show called 'Legends in Concert.' We saw that show, like, ten times. I met 'Elvis' and 'Marilyn Monroe.' You know you're getting old when the Legends in Concert are people you used to listen to in high school." Big laugh. Adam Hasner, a friend who served with Rubio in the Florida

House, told me, "When you're running for office in Miami-Dade County, you're spending a lot of time in senior centers."

At the age of forty-four, Rubio has lively dark eyes, soft cheeks, and downy brown hair affixed in a perfect part. He sometimes asks crowds to see him in the tradition of a "young President who said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.'" (J.F.K. was forty-three when he entered the White House.) Senator Ted Cruz, of Texas, is only five months older than Rubio, but nobody calls him boyish.

If the Democrats nominate Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders, the Party will be offering the oldest candidate that it has ever run in a general election, and Rubio has taken to saying, "Never in the modern history of this country has the political class in both parties been more out of touch with our country than it is right now." But in policy terms Rubio can appear older than his years. His opposition to same-sex marriage, to raising the minimum wage, and to restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba puts him out of step with most American Latinos. In the Spanish-language media, he is sometimes described as *un joven viejo*—a young fogey.

After a summer submerged in a raucous primary field, Rubio had recently climbed into third place. He was ahead of Jeb Bush, his former mentor, and far behind Trump and Ben Carson. Trump's campaign marched to the sound of a dirge—"The American Dream is dead," he told crowds—and Rubio presented himself as a sunny alternative, a way out of Trump's sulfurous moment. "We're very blessed to have so many good people running for President," he said earnestly to the crowd in Boulder City.

I had seen Rubio at half a dozen



REDUX

it," Rubio says.

# FURIES 2.0



events—in Iowa, New York, Nevada—and his speeches were blemished only by a tic: he occasionally slips into a singsong cadence, turning his story into a breathy schoolboy lullaby about the “new American century.” On the whole, he is impressively consistent. Rubio in Dubuque in October was nearly indistinguishable from Rubio in Miami in April, the political equivalent of a well-managed restaurant chain: “Repeal and replace Obamacare,” scrap President Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran “on Day One,” create the “most affordable business taxes in the world”—all the while heeding the populist frustrations of the moment. Vowing to remake higher education, he said, “When I’m President, before you take on student loans you’re going to know how much people make when they graduate from that school with that degree. You’re going to know that the market for philosophers has tightened over the last two thousand years.” In 2012, Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee, spoke worshipfully of “job creators.” Rubio rarely mentions them. He returns, over and over, to his central task: how to make

helping the poor and the middle class a Republican issue. He tells crowds, “We can no longer allow big government to be used as a tool of crony capitalism.”

But, at bottom, his campaign is only partly about policy. In a contest against a real-estate tycoon and the son and brother of former Presidents, Rubio is campaigning on the vision of a country where “the son of a bartender and a maid” can reach the White House. “It’s not just my story—it is literally *our* story,” he told the Boulder City crowd. “In this nation, we are all but a generation or two removed from someone who made our future the very purpose of their lives. Whether or not we remain a special country will be determined by whether or not that journey is still possible for the people trying to make it now.”

The applause was long and loud, and as Rubio climbed down from the stage to pose for selfies I asked the first couple I saw what they made of him. Cornelia Wallace, a retired nurse from the Chicago suburbs, said, “Well, I’ve got tears welled up in my eyes.” She laughed at her own reaction. “It touched my

heart,” she said, and shrugged. “I get a passion from him that I don’t get from the others.”

In Las Vegas, Rubio was staying at the Bellagio. We met in a suite appointed in the Vegas Italianate style—leather, chrome, photos of fountains. When I stopped by one morning, the windows were shrouded by heavy burgundy drapes, and Rubio was worried about his voice. “I’ve been coming down with something,” he said, crossing the conference room to retrieve a bottle of water. “My throat is always feeling dry.” Doctors had told him it was an allergic reaction. “I said, ‘How come I’ve never had allergies before, and now, suddenly, the last four years I’ve developed allergies?’ And the answer the doctor gave me was: ‘Well, because you’re travelling to places that you never used to travel to before.’”

He had made his first impression on many people outside Florida in 2013, when he gave the rebuttal to the State of the Union and leaned awkwardly offscreen to guzzle from a Poland Spring bottle—a moment that took flight on Twitter as #watergate. Trump, as the Party’s schoolyard bully, carps on the habit constantly, and recently mailed Rubio a case of Trump-branded water.

Rubio, who was spending three days in Nevada, had scheduled both public and closed-door activities. On the first night, he met with Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire casino magnate and donor. In April, Politico had published a story headlined “RUBIO TAKES LEAD IN SHELDON ADELSON PRIMARY,” which reported that Rubio had been calling Adelson every two weeks. I asked Rubio about it, and he said, “I don’t know about every couple of weeks, but I talk to him quite a bit.” Adelson spent about ninety-eight million dollars in connection with the 2012 campaign, including twenty million on the campaign of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. He has yet to commit to a candidate in 2016. Rubio described Adelson and himself as natural allies. “The only thing Sheldon Adelson has talked to me about policy-wise is Israel,” he said. “And he doesn’t have to convince me on that, because I’m pro-Israel with or without Sheldon’s support.”

Rubio’s campaign had invited donors



from around the country to join him at the Bellagio, for a football-themed retreat. The guests attended a “breakfast and team talk” and a strategy session called “Quarterbacking Victory.” One afternoon, they played flag football at a nearby sports complex, and Rubio was the quarterback on both teams. Over the years, he has developed the ability to disarm jaded donors. Bob List, the former governor of Nevada, told me about watching Rubio work a roomful of prosperous Las Vegas businessmen. At one point, Rubio was asked where his inspiration for politics originated. “He said, ‘I remember one day my father took me in the car, and we drove over to the neighborhood where Liberace’s house was.’” List noted, “And *everybody* knew where Liberace’s house was.” He went on, “He said, ‘We would drive around that neighborhood, and he’d show me where all the rich people lived, and he’d say, ‘Son, if you want to live like these people, you can do it.’”” List shook his head and said, “He’s *good-good*.”

Rubio, who has entered six elections and never lost, is alert to the appearance of overweening ambition. “All my life I’ve been in a hurry to get to my future,” he wrote in his memoir, “An American Son,” published in 2012, his second year in the Senate. In conversation, he sometimes answers so quickly that his friend Dennis Baxley, a Republican in the Florida House, once gave him a piece of advice. “I said, ‘Marco, don’t change anything you’re saying, but just wait, like, three seconds before you say it, and you’ll look so pensive.’” When things go wrong, Rubio’s impatience can suggest a man climbing too fast for his own good. In Washington foreign-policy circles, people remember a moment at the Brookings Institution, in April, 2012, when Rubio was delivering a major foreign-policy speech. Reaching the final page, he discovered that it had been removed accidentally from the lectern. Some politicians might have improvised; Rubio stopped awkwardly, in mid-sentence, and asked for the page to be returned.

For Republican strategists, the loss of the 2012 Presidential election contained signals that spoke to the Party’s future. Latinos are the largest minority group in America, but in 2012 “there

was more talk about electrified fences than there was about higher education and tuition,” Peter Wehner, a Republican speechwriter and strategist who served in the past three Republican Administrations, told me. “You can’t win elections when you do that.” Romney, who had called for the “self-deportation” of immigrants, received just twenty-seven per cent of the Latino vote—seventeen points less than what George W. Bush received in 2004. For years, Republicans have believed that they should be faring better with Hispanic voters. Ronald Reagan liked to say that Latinos are Republicans but “just don’t know it yet.” Lionel Sosa, a Texas adman who was hired to run Reagan’s outreach program to Latinos, recalled, “Ronald Reagan told me, back in the 1980 race, ‘Latinos are conservative people. As Republicans, we share the same basic conservative values. We believe in hard work. We believe in family.’”

For Wehner and other reform-minded conservatives, the lessons of 2012 were also economic. “The middle class felt vulnerable and nervous, because of stagnant wages for twenty-five years and skyrocketing costs in health care and higher education,” Wehner told me. “The Party needed an agenda, and it was out of touch with middle-class concerns.” The reformers urged the Party to get over same-sex marriage (a “losing battle”), focus on economic anxiety, and, above all, identify a leader who could articulate a vision that reached beyond Party orthodoxy. As Wehner put it, “You need a figure like a Bill Clinton or a Tony Blair, who can reassure the base and inspire them, but also to signal to people who are not voting for you, ‘We get it.’”

Whit Ayres, a leading Republican analyst who has been Rubio’s pollster for the past five years, drew a somewhat different lesson. He agreed about the demographic reality. “Unfortunately for Republicans, the math is only going to get worse,” he wrote in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*. “Groups that form the core of G.O.P. support—older whites, blue-collar whites, married people and rural residents—are declining as a proportion of the electorate. Groups that

lean Democratic—minorities, young people and single women—are growing.” He calculated that, in order to win, a Republican Presidential candidate would need at least forty per cent of the Latino vote. But in “2016 and Beyond: How Republicans Can Elect a President in the New America,” published earlier this year, Ayres made a subtle distinction between style and substance. He wrote that polls have found “no evidence that America has shifted to the left.” In his view, America remains a center-right country, the Party’s core ideas are sound, and the problem lies in finding “the right candidate, the right message, and the right tone.” He tested a range of ways of presenting core Republican ideas and composed a list of dos and don’ts. Don’t say we have to reform entitlements or “we will never balance the budget.” Do say that entitlement reform is “the only way to save popular programs.”

The Party’s plans to change its tone did not last long. In the 2014 midterm elections, conservative candidates seized on reports of a surge of unaccompanied minors crossing the Mexican border, spurred largely by gang- and drug-related violence in Central America, and proclaimed an immigration crisis. Though the number of undocumented immigrants apprehended at the border was at its lowest level in decades, voters who were anxious about jobs and opportunity responded to increasingly militant language. When Trump announced his candidacy, this

summer, he said of Mexicans, “They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” Mel Martínez, the former Florida senator (the chamber’s first Cuban-American) and a former head of the Republican National Committee, told me, “Republicans say, ‘Mel, what do we have to do

to get the Hispanic vote?’ And one thing I would say is, ‘First of all, stop offending Hispanics!’” He urged the parties not to regard a diverse range of voters as a single bloc. “The bottom line is that we are not ‘Hispanics.’ We’re Cuban-Americans, we’re Mexican-Americans, and so forth.” Cuban-Americans represent only about four per cent of the Latino population, and



their votes and interests are not always in accord with those of other Latinos. For one thing, many Latinos resent the accelerated path to citizenship that Congress bestowed on Cuban arrivals during the Cold War, a privilege not granted to Colombians, Guatemalans, and others who have faced repression.

"There are persuaders and there are crusaders, and I think Rubio is a persuader," Wehner told me. "When you're losing Presidential elections on a consistent basis, you've got to nominate somebody who is a persuader." A conservative Super PAC ranked Rubio as the ninth most conservative member of the 114th Congress, but, unlike Ted Cruz, who amplifies confrontation, he excels at rounding off the corners of conventional conservative prescriptions. "I want to be the world leader in renewables," he tells crowds. "But we better also be the world leader in oil and natural gas."

At times, Rubio's desire to embrace competing views becomes unworkable. In January, he voted for a Senate resolution affirming that climate change is real, but he often voices doubts about the role of humans in it. I mentioned that this puts him at odds with the young generation that he wants to represent. He said, "People who are passionate about climate change come to us and say, 'The environment is changing because of human activity. The scientists say so.' And then they say, 'And here's what we want you to do.' And so they present me with this idea, and I look at this idea, and I ask them, 'Well, if I pass this, how many inches or feet of sea rise will it prevent?' And they'll say, 'Well, it won't prevent any.' I say O.K. Then I turn to the economists and say, 'What impact will this law have on the economy?' And they say, 'It will increase the cost of living, it will cost jobs, it will make America less competitive economically.' And so I say, 'So you're asking me to pass something that's bad economically and does nothing for the environment other than lead the way by example? I think that's a bad trade-off. I'm not supporting those laws.'" (Ken Caldeira, a senior scientist at the Carnegie Institution for Science's Department of Global Ecology, at Stanford, told me, "If Senator Rubio is talking to scientists who say that avoiding greenhouse-gas

## CHEKHOV

They say you may have caught  
tuberculosis from the peasants  
who came to Melikhovo

to be seen by you. Hearing them  
coughing in the hall you put down  
your pen and rose from your desk.

Short of breath, they had travelled  
all night to arrive by dawn, drawn  
by rumors of your kindness.

While you warmed the stethoscope  
in your hands and the old farmer  
bared his chest, your character

stood patiently on the doorstep,  
holding a letter of introduction  
you had yet to write. The longer

you spent away from the story  
the harder it would be to finish it,  
but the hall was long, the line

out the door, and you would turn  
none away, knowing how far  
they had come for the comfort

of having someone  
listen to their lungs and say it  
sounded better than it sounded

while you stood breathing  
in their sighs of relief,  
saying, softly, "Next."

—Austin Smith

emissions won't help avoid sea-level rise, he is talking to the wrong scientists.")

Rubio's inclusiveness can invite caricature. He considers himself a Catholic, but he attends two churches—an evangelical Protestant service on Saturdays and a Roman Catholic Mass on Sundays. He used to proclaim his love of nineties-era hip-hop—particularly Tupac Shakur—but recently he has also taken to praising cross-genre artists, such as Drake and the Weeknd, who blend electronic dance music with hip-hop, rap, and R.&B. "It's a twenty-first-century ability to take music and use it in a way that motivates people,"

he said last month on CNN, mirroring his campaign rhetoric. "Some of it is blended with other sounds that are sampled from recordings that others have had in the past, and you see traditional artists being brought in and their voices used on an electronic soundtrack."

Rubio's ecumenism is one reason that prominent Democrats consider him the most worrisome contender. David Axelrod, Obama's former chief strategist, told me that Rubio "seems to be able to build bridges between the two factions of the Republican Party." He said, "There is a real civil war going on between populist anti-government



Republicans and the establishment conservatives, and Rubio has thus far been able to escape that divide." Axelrod added, "But it's going to be harder as time goes on, and he is probably going to have to plant his feet in one place or another."

I asked Rubio if it concerned him that Republicans often appear to be at war with themselves. A day earlier, the House Majority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, facing intense criticism by conservative members of his party, had abandoned plans to run for Speaker. "If the alternative was they all went into a smoke-filled room and cut a deal outside the limelight, everyone would say, 'Oh, then it's a done deal, it's a stagnant process,'" Rubio said. The turmoil might offer "a new opportunity that elevates a new generation of leadership."

Marco Antonio Rubio was born in Miami in 1971, the third of four children. (The oldest, Mario, became an Army Green Beret and, later, a city official in Jacksonville; Rubio's sisters, Barbara and Veronica, live in Miami.) For years, he described himself, in political terms, as the "son of Cuban exiles." "Nothing against immigrants, but my parents are exiles," he said during his Senate campaign. "Folks that are exiles are people that have lost their country." But in October, 2011, the *Washington Post* and the *St. Petersburg Times* reported that, according to immigration records, his family had left Cuba voluntarily, as émigrés, aboard a commercial flight, in May, 1956, more than two and a half years before Fidel Castro took power. Like many other immigrants, Rubio's parents, Oriaes and Mario, left in pursuit of jobs and opportunity. (Mario, the bartender, died in 2010.) The *Post* suggested that Rubio had embellished his story to gain cachet with political refugees, some of whom regard pre-Castro migrants with suspicion. Rubio called that suggestion "outrageous," saying that he had relied on his family's "oral history."

Rubio's allies have defended his misstatements as an innocent error, but Guillermo Grenier, a sociologist at Florida International University, who studies the political attitudes of Cuban-Americans, told me that the explanation left many people unconvinced. "I think the dominant view is that he was

misrepresenting his life story to make it more like the community he was trying to represent," Grenier said. In a speech to the Hispanic Leadership Network, in January, 2012, Rubio said that the controversy had turned into "a blessing in disguise." He explained, "It made me do something that we don't do enough of. And that's go back and discover who our parents were when they were our age."

Because the Rubios had relatives in the United States, they gained a path to citizenship. Marco, or Tony, as he was known at home, was a strong-willed child. When the family moved to Nevada, he immersed himself in Mormon reading, and joined the Mormon Church, along with his mother and one of his sisters. A few years later, they reëmbarked Catholicism, "mostly at my instigation," he wrote in "An American Son." He also recalled that he was an "inattentive and undisciplined student."

The autobiography of a sitting senator is a carefully manicured history. "I wrote a paper in the fifth grade praising President Reagan for restoring the U.S. military after it had been demoralized and allowed to decay in the years before his presidency," he notes. But he writes vividly about the most influential figure in his childhood—his maternal grandfather, Pedro Víctor García, whom he calls "my closest boyhood friend." According to Rubio's biographer Manuel Roig-Franzia, in 1962 García arrived from Cuba without a visa and was eventually ordered to be deported. He stayed anyway, becoming an undocumented immigrant. The Cuban missile crisis saved him; commercial air travel to Cuba was suspended, and, eventually, he was granted permanent residency. In Rubio's recollection, his grandfather spent much of his retirement in an aluminum chair on the front porch of his daughter's home, smoking cigars and advising Marco on the alleged perfidy of Jimmy Carter:

He was weak, he said, and other countries preyed on his weakness. . . . Ronald Reagan would restore our strength, he assured me. . . . Reagan's election and my grandfather's allegiance to him were defining influences on me politically. I've been a Republican ever since.

Actually, Rubio's politics were not quite so fixed. His father was a mem-

ber of the Culinary Workers Union, and in 1984 it went on strike at Sam's Town, the casino where he worked. Marco became an ardent supporter—making signs, blocking management's cameras. But when the family ran low on money his father crossed the picket line. "I accused him of selling out and called him a scab," Rubio wrote later. "It hurt him, and I'm ashamed of it."

I asked Rubio what he took from that experience, and he replied, "That a thirteen-year-old has the luxury of being a hundred-per-cent idealistic. A fifty-year-old has to pay the bills and provide for the family, and it was a tough choice for my dad."

Today, he keeps his distance from the labor movement, and contends that workers now have advantages that his father's generation did not. "The difference is, of course, that today, in Las Vegas and around the country, people have a lot more mobility," he said. "In essence, if you don't like what they are paying you at Sam's Town, you can go work at, you know, the Venetian, or you can go work at Palace Station, or you can go work at the Wynn." He went on, "I'm not anti-union. For example, I think we can work with blue-collar unions on a lot of issues. But I also don't think that we can allow unions to destroy industries their workers are in."

Yvanna Cancela, the political director of Local 226, of which Rubio's father was a member, described Rubio's image of workers' options as unrealistic. "Rather than imagine an economy where workers have to leave a job to get a better life," she said, "Senator Rubio should focus on how workers, like his father, have fought to create a standard so they don't have to."

In Marco's junior year of high school, his sister Barbara's husband, Orlando Cicilia, was arrested for his role in a drug-trafficking ring. Sentenced to twenty-five years in prison, he was paroled in 2000. (The connection to Rubio went unreported until 2012, when *Univision* revealed it, over the protests of Rubio's aides.) The arrest added to the strain on the family. Rubio's grade-point average at the end of his senior year was 2.1; he was allowed to graduate after attending summer school. He went on to a small college in Missouri, transferred



*"We can't pull the plug. We're all still on her insurance."*

to a community college, and ultimately graduated from the University of Florida, in 1993.

Rubio was already in politics by then. After his sophomore year, he had called a local congressional office and got a summer internship, and then, in 1996, while in law school at the University of Miami, he was hired to run the local branch of Bob Dole's Presidential campaign. On and off since high school, Rubio had been dating Jeanette Dousdebbs, a Colombian-American who became a Miami Dolphins cheerleader. In 1998, they married, and they have four children, ranging in age from eight to fifteen.

Jeanette never moved to Washington, preferring to stay in Florida with the children. "She's not a political person," Rubio told me. "She doesn't have any political ambitions for me or for herself." She does not enjoy politicking; she once told an interviewer, "If I have to do it, of course I'll do it. But in general I am shy." She works part time for the family foundation of Norman Braman, a billionaire auto dealer and former owner of the Philadelphia Eagles, who has been an unusually supportive patron of the Rubio family. Over the years, he has donated repeatedly to Rubio's campaigns, hired him as a lawyer, and made contributions to a public-policy center at Florida International Uni-

versity, where Rubio was an instructor.

Unlike most modern Presidential candidates, Rubio began his life in elected office at the lowest rung. (Jeb Bush's first campaign was for governor.) Rubio was twenty-six and living at home with his parents when, in April, 1998, he won a seat on the five-member city commission in West Miami, a Cuban enclave with fewer than six thousand people. He weighed questions about the location of bus benches and the snacks in vending machines, all the while courting local political bosses.

Raúl Martínez was the mayor of blue-collar Hialeah, and he greeted Rubio warily. "In my office, we meet, and you know what? He's a very personable person," Martínez told me. But over time he was put off by Rubio's ambition. "Marco was the prince—he was the chosen," Martínez said. "You can see him deciding, 'Where's my next move up the ladder?'" Nevertheless, Rubio accumulated mentors, including Governor Jeb Bush, who noticed him during his first race, for the West Miami commission, and called to congratulate him on Election Night. They became friends, and Rubio took every chance to praise Bush: "He's practically Cuban, just taller," he told reporters, and later said that, whenever he confronted a difficult problem in the Senate, he asked, "W.W.J.D.?"—What would Jeb do?

Within two years, in 1999, Rubio

spotted an open seat in the state legislature. He didn't live in that district, but he won a special election and moved his residency in time for the swearing-in. He arrived at an auspicious moment: newly installed term limits, inspired by a bonanza of corruption cases, were driving out senior lawmakers. He was sometimes mistaken for a clerk, but he embraced conservative doctrine—he read Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged" twice in his first term—and attracted allies. Nine months later, he was the majority whip; two years later, he was the majority leader; and a year after that he was in line to be the youngest Speaker in Florida history, a post that he assumed in 2006.

At his swearing-in, Jeb Bush presented him with a faux-precious sword from a "mystical warrior." (The inscription, "Unleash Chiang," had been a rallying cry in the nineteen-fifties for right-wingers who wanted to arm Chiang Kai-shek's government in Taiwan, so that it could attack mainland China. In the Bush family, however, the slogan was a tennis-court joke that George H. W. Bush used when he was preparing to serve.) Jeb told the audience, "I can't think back on a time when I've ever been prouder to be a Republican, Marco." Rubio displayed the sword on a wall of his office.

For the work of political arm-twisting, he relied on two fellow-representatives, David Rivera and Ralph Arza—or "Boris and Natasha," as Dan Gelber, the minority leader, nicknamed them, after the "Rocky and Bullwinkle" villains. "I said it jokingly, but there was a little bit of truth," he told me. "Something would pop up in a bill, and I'd wonder how the hell it got there. Then I'd look at them and they'd smile." Rubio's lieutenants proved to be problematic. Arza was forced to resign from the legislature in 2006, after he used the word "nigger" in a drunken message left on a colleague's voice mail. He pleaded guilty to intimidating a witness and agreed to undergo alcohol and anger counselling. Rivera (who had bought a house with Rubio in Tallahassee, to use when the legislature was in session) went on to Congress but has been the target of state and federal investigations into his income and into his alleged role in supporting a shadow candidate to undercut his rival in the 2012 campaign.



He has denied wrongdoing and has not been charged. The Bush campaign, in a slide presentation to donors, has cited the friendship with the “scandal-tarred” Rivera as evidence that Rubio is a “risky bet.” Rubio aides tell reporters that the candidate rarely sees Rivera anymore, but Rivera and Arza were among Rubio’s supporters at the Republican debate in Cleveland.

Rubio has struggled to manage his personal and professional finances. On several occasions, he used a Republican Party American Express card to charge personal expenses—\$3,765 for landscaping stones at his house, ten thousand dollars for a family reunion in Georgia, a hundred and thirty-four dollars in a hair salon. In each case, he made good on the charge before it was publicly reported and explained it as a mixup. A state ethics commission investigated the incidents and cleared him, but that hasn’t stopped his opponents from bringing them up.

His income has fluctuated dramatically. In 2000, his first year in the legislature, he was still saddled with student debt. As he ascended in the House leadership, he was hired by Broad & Cassel, a prominent law and lobbying firm, and his annual income grew to more than four hundred thousand dollars. In 2012, he received a contract for his memoir, worth at least eight hundred thousand dollars, and yet, even with his rising income, he cashed out sixty-eight thousand dollars from a retirement account, paying a heavy tax penalty. When reporters asked about it, he said, “My refrigerator broke down.” Political rivals wondered if he had a gambling problem, and searched for evidence but found none. Indeed, Rubio has incorporated the questions about his financial dealings into his self-narrative. “Here’s the truth,” he said, flanked by prosperous rivals, during the third Republican debate, in Boulder, Colorado. “I didn’t inherit any money.” He added, “But I’m not worried about my finances. I’m worried about the finances of everyday Americans.”

After Rubio finished at the Elks Lodge in Boulder City, he drove to North Las Vegas, a blue-collar suburb where he and his family once lived in a two-bedroom cinder-block house.

The city has a large Hispanic population, and bus shelters advertise lawyers who specialize in *inmigración*. He was scheduled to speak at an event organized by the LIBRE Initiative, a non-profit group funded in part by the Koch brothers. The logo on the backdrop declared, “Limited Government, Unlimited Opportunities.”

To fulfill Reagan’s prophecy that Latino voters will become Republicans, the Party will need to make its economic case in places like Nevada. Between 1994 and 2012, the Latino share of Nevada’s electorate tripled, from five per cent to fifteen per cent. So far, Latinos have been voting mainly for Democrats. Senator Harry Reid won a tight reelection fight in 2010 largely because he received ninety-four per cent of the Latino vote. By the end of this decade, non-Hispanic whites will likely be a minority in Nevada.

The event was held at St. Christopher Catholic School, which Rubio attended briefly as a child. (After lobbying his parents to find a way to cover the tuition, he arrived to find that he hated the uniforms, the extra schoolwork, and the distance from his friends, and he pleaded to go back to public school. “I made life unbearable in our house, and within a week, my parents had relented,” he writes. “I cringe today when I remember how selfishly I behaved.”)

Drawing on the ideas of reform-minded conservatives, Rubio told the audience, “We have government policies that, quite frankly, have not allowed this economy to grow fast enough and create better-paying jobs.” He went on, “These are the impediments to upward mobility: an economy that isn’t creating better-paying jobs and a higher-education system that’s too expensive or inaccessible. And the result is we are leaving people behind.”

The crux of Rubio’s economic argument is that the poor and the middle class are facing different problems from those his parents faced. He opposes raising the minimum wage, arguing that it will lead to automation and outsourcing. He wants a greater share of young people to consider trade schools and apprenticeships instead of incurring the debts of a four-year education. “You’re going to have eighteen-year-olds in this country making fifty thousand dollars

a year making cars, making seventy thousand dollars a year as a welder!” he says. (His rhapsodies about welding have been ridiculed, because the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the median wage for welders is less than thirty-eight thousand dollars.)

Rubio told the audience that the notion that “big government is good for the people who are trying to make it” is a “lie.” He said, “When the government dominates the economy, the people that can afford to influence the government—they win. And everybody else is stuck.” He went on, “They know that you can’t start a business out of the spare bedroom of your home if you have to fill out fifteen permits and hire lawyers and lobbyists, and they love it because that means they have no competition.”

At one point while Rubio was in the Florida House, he and David Rivera visited Washington and got in touch with Mel Martínez, who was then in the Senate. “I walked him around the Capitol, and he was like a kid with his eyes popping out, you know? ‘Oh, my gosh, this is so cool. Oh, my gosh,’” Martínez recalled. Within a few years, Rubio was back, with a purpose. “I invited him to lunch in the Senate dining room, and I got the definite impression that he was kind of fishing around as to if I was going to run for reelection or not,” Martínez said. “I thought it was a bit premature to be talking about that.”

After term limits forced Rubio out of the Florida House, in 2008, he worked as a consultant for hospitals, a television pundit, and a college instructor, but by 2009 he was antsy. Martínez had announced his retirement, and Rubio wanted to challenge Charlie Crist, the former Republican governor, for the vacant Senate seat, but Party leaders had chosen Crist, and they told Rubio that they would oppose him with money and endorsements. Rubio’s friend Dennis Baxley received a text message from him: “I can’t quit thinking about U.S. Senate. They want me to do Attorney General of Florida instead, but what do you think?” Baxley said, “I texted him back. I said, ‘What does your wife think?’ She’s the spiritual depth gauge.” Jeanette approved.

Rubio began more than thirty points behind, and almost dropped out. But

he sensed that Crist was vulnerable on the right. Small, far-right rallies were gathering steam around the state; they eventually became the Tea Party. Driving around Florida in an F-150 pickup, Rubio went to rallies, and he portrayed Crist as an ally of Obama. He accentuated new priorities. Previously, progressive immigration activists had considered him an ally, because he supported tuition assistance for the children of undocumented workers and used his power to bury hard-line anti-immigration bills. But now he renounced the tuition program; he made use of the phrase “illegal aliens,” and condemned the Dream Act, which would have protected undocumented young people, as a step toward “a blanket amnesty.”

He said that he would have supported a controversial Arizona measure that critics called the “Show me your papers” law. (Before his campaign, he had said that the law would be akin to creating a “police state.”) He also received help from Jeb Bush, who introduced him to top donors and helped him secure endorsements. He got the nomination, and won the general election by nearly twenty points. At his victory party, Bush introduced him. The *Weekly Standard* hailed Rubio as “the most important freshman senator.” In the Senate, Rubio maintained his opposition to the Dream Act. Presente, an online Latino activist group, ran a campaign with the tagline “No Somos Rubios”—“We’re not Rubios.”

In 2012, Mitt Romney considered Rubio as a possible running mate. Democratic researchers had assembled and released an opposition-research file that focussed on Rubio’s relationship with Rivera and on the financial errors, portraying them as evidence of ineptness or profiteering. In the end, Romney chose the Wisconsin congressman Paul Ryan. In materials shared with donors and reporters, the Bush campaign has alleged that Rubio was rejected because of concerns about his background. But Beth Myers, the Romney adviser who oversaw the Vice-Presidential search, told Politico last month that that is “simply wrong,” and went on, “I can say that Senator Rubio ‘passed’ our vetting and we found nothing that disqualified him from serving as VP.”

After Romney lost, the G.O.P.’s official autopsy concluded that the Party had

## PARIS, 3 A.M. BY MARK POWER



MAGNUM

*Flowers left outside La Casa Nostra restaurant a few days after several people were killed*





*there by terrorist gunfire, in one of six attacks on the city. More photographs can be seen at [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com).*

to “embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform.” A small group of Republicans and Democrats in the Senate were organizing the first push for a bill that could satisfy both the left and the right, by combining a path to citizenship for eleven million undocumented immigrants with border-control measures. The group coveted Rubio’s participation, because he had both Tea Party support and Latino heritage. In December, Senator Dick Durbin, of Illinois, the No. 2 leader in the Democratic majority, encountered Rubio in the Senate gym and recruited him to what became known as the Gang of Eight. *Time* put him on the cover with the tagline “The Republican Savior.” He blitzed conservative media and white Evangelical audiences, arguing that border security and citizenship had to be “interwoven” in the bill. “It’s literally impossible to do one part without doing the other,” he said.

But his staff was ambivalent: his political strategists worried that it would cost him conservative support. After Rubio signed on to the bill, Glenn Beck declared, “What a piece of garbage this guy is.” But Rubio stayed with it, and when the bill reached the Senate floor, on June 27, 2013, he delivered the most powerful speech of his career, recalling that the first words that his father learned in English were “I am looking for work.” He quoted from the inscription on the Statue of Liberty, and said, “Here in America, generations of unfulfilled dreams will finally come to pass.”

The bill passed the Senate, but Rubio’s poll numbers were dropping, and he was having second thoughts. He was the only one of the eight senators who did not attend a news conference after the vote. In the weeks ahead, he walked away from the immigration bill. He told Sean Hannity, of Fox News, that repealing Obamacare was “more important” than his legislation. In October, he dismissed the bill as something “the Democrats in the Senate are demanding.” He stopped talking about immigration almost entirely. Matt Viser, of the *Boston Globe*, searched the *Congressional Record* and found that Rubio referred to immigration a hundred and thirty-five times on the Senate floor in 2013. In the next

two years, he mentioned it twice. (The House never brought the bill up for a vote, and it died.)

Rubio had come to Washington with ambitions to cut the debt, reduce spending, and curb E.P.A. rules in Florida, but none of those plans succeeded. In his first year, his only successful bill was a measure that designated Septem-



ber as National Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Month. He began losing enthusiasm for the Senate. The failure of the immigration bill hastened the process.

Rubio had talked about running for President, but in Florida political circles few people imagined that he would run in 2016 if Bush did. “I didn’t conceive of them both deciding to compete, because the relationship goes so far back,” Baxley said. One of Rubio’s friends said he told him, “I’m not afraid of running too soon. I’m afraid of waiting too long.”

For those with strong ties to both Rubio and Bush, Rubio’s decision was discomfiting. The Miami Republican operative Al Cardenas, who gave Rubio his first job out of law school (and attended his wedding), and pushed for him to be a Vice-Presidential candidate in 2012, told Fox Latino, “I had hoped he would stay in the Senate,” adding, “It’s like running against your uncle for the president of the company.” When Rubio was asked why he did not defer to his mentor, he replied, “I didn’t know there was a line.” Asked about the sword that Bush gave him, Rubio told reporters, “I have it somewhere at home. I have young kids. I don’t want them running around with a sword.”

Rubio announced his campaign on April 13th, at Miami’s Freedom Tower, a former newspaper building that the federal government had used in the sixties and early seventies as a Cuban-refugee center. It was nicknamed the Ellis Island of the South. Flanked by enormous American flags, he told the crowd,

in a message that pointed at both Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush, “Yesterday is over.” At the announcement, demonstrators from Latino advocacy groups carried signs declaring “El Sueño de Rubio Es Nuestra Pesadilla” (“Rubio’s Dream Is Our Nightmare”). On “Despierta América,” the morning newscast on Univision, the host Satcha Pretto noted the presence of the protesters, and said, “Many immigrants are already asking themselves, ‘Does he want to support us or deport us?’”

After Rubio finished a speech one night in Las Vegas, I visited a community organizer named Leo Murrieta, who founded the Center for Latino Prosperity, a nonpartisan nonprofit that conducts research and advocacy. Barrel-chested and bearded, he wore a cardigan and rectangular glasses. Murrieta, who is twenty-nine, has heard Rubio tell his story over the years; he flashed a smile and said of himself, “My dad was a dishwasher and my mom was a housekeeper.”

He was born in Mexico while his parents and three siblings were en route to the United States. A church helped them get green cards and allowed them to sleep in the pews for three years until they had saved enough for an apartment in a poor section of Las Vegas. “My parents would go without food. I don’t remember buying new shoes when I was a kid. But I think a lot of people go through that, in different ways.” He learned English from “Sesame Street.” “So I was the family translator until I was eight.” His older brother found work bagging groceries, and the family moved to West Las Vegas, another troubled part of town.

Murrieta became a naturalized citizen in 2010—“my American birthday,” he calls it. “It was the most beautiful moment of my life. And I registered to vote literally the moment after that, because all I ever wanted to do was vote.” In 2013, he worked nationally on immigration reform and labor issues. “I was blessed to be able to be in a lot of the rooms where policy was being discussed.” He said that Latinos would be receptive to a Republican message, but he thinks that the LIBRE Initiative promotes the interests of big business rather than the interests of the community.



I asked what he made of Rubio's work on immigration reform. "He was for it before he was against it," he said. "I'm an immigrant kid from the poorest parts of Vegas, and my family is touched by every form of immigration." His brother-in-law and sister-in-law are undocumented. "This bill would have saved my family a lot of fear. You know, we still live in fear that our family is going to be torn apart." He went on, "I've seen Marco Rubio give us lip service. I've seen him and his staff say that they support us. But then, when the spotlight is put on them, they don't have the muscle to stand. And that's not what we need in a President. We need someone who can stand up and stay true to what he's said." He added, "One of us has forgotten where we came from."

The more we talked, the more dispirited Murrieta became about the state of the immigration debate in America. The Obama Administration's executive actions, announced in 2014, would have shielded members of his family against the threat of deportation, but then a court ruling blocked that protection. His mother called him in panic. "She asked me, '*Qué quiere decir?*'—'What does it mean?'"

Janet Murguía, the president and C.E.O. of the national council of La Raza, the largest Latino civil-rights and advocacy organization, told me, "People would underestimate the Latino community to think that they want to see a Hispanic President so badly that they'll discard their positions on the issues. That's ludicrous." Of Rubio, she said, "He walked away from comprehensive immigration reform." She added, "A measure of his viability is in how he is able to reconcile both his party's demands and his natural inclinations."

The Reverend Samuel Rodriguez is the president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, which represents more than forty thousand evangelical congregations. He gave a benediction at the last Republican National Convention. He told me, "Let me really take the filters off: Marco Rubio's de-facto one-eighty on immigration after the Gang of Eight failed was nothing other than a mistake. It was a serious mistake, and, I would

argue, an ethical miscalculation." Since then, however, Rodriguez has decided to give Rubio another chance. "I believe Senator Marco Rubio learned his lesson," he said.

A Gallup poll released in August found that among Hispanic voters Bush has a net favorability rating of eleven points; Rubio trails him, with five points. Clinton's net favorability with Hispanics is forty points. But when I asked Lionel Sosa, Reagan's Latino outreach director, how he thought Rubio would do with Hispanics in a general election, he said that although he had heard the criticisms, he thought they would fade. "The first Latino that has a chance to become President? All bets are off. I would say that he could easily capture sixty to sixty-five per cent of the Latino vote."

It was, perhaps, inevitable that Marco Rubio would open the deepest cut in the troubled campaign of Jeb Bush. For days before the third Republican debate, the Bush campaign had been criticizing Rubio for missing Senate votes this year. During the debate, Bush sensed an opportunity and turned to face his former protégé. "Marco, when

you signed up for this, this was a six-year term, and you should be showing up to work," Bush said. "I mean, literally, the Senate—what is it, like, a French work week?" He delivered the line awkwardly, like a principal making a cameo appearance in a school play.

Rubio stared at him evenly. "I don't remember you ever complaining about John McCain's vote record," he said, and added, pityingly, "The only reason why you're doing it now is because we're running for the same position, and someone has convinced you that attacking me is going to help you." Applause rose from the audience. The phrase "Someone has convinced you" was lethal. Bush—suddenly in the role of the misled, desperate old pol—smiled wanly and tried to speak, but Rubio turned to face the camera. "My campaign is going to be about the future of America—it's not going to be about attacking anyone else on this stage," he said. "I will continue to have tremendous admiration and respect for Governor Bush." It sounded like a eulogy.

The next day, Rubio appeared on six network- and cable-news shows and attracted three-quarters of a million



*"You'd better come up with something that will sell—or else. I hope that was helpful."*



*"Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow,  
but soon and for the rest of your life."*

dollars in donations online. Then came the mother lode. On October 30th, Paul Singer, the hedge-fund billionaire, who donated more money to Republican candidates and causes last year than anyone else in America, sent a letter to dozens of donors, encouraging them to help raise money for Rubio, calling him "perfect for this moment" and the best choice to "navigate this complex primary process, and still be in a position to defeat Secretary Clinton in November 2016." Rubio had been courting Singer for weeks.

A few days later, I met Rubio for breakfast in New York, at a restaurant in the Hyatt in Times Square. He arrived at seven-thirty, with two staff members, and slid into the booth. He ordered a cappuccino, and then called after the waitress, "Can I get a double shot of espresso in it?" He looked tired. He was trying to maintain a semblance of a routine: six hours of sleep, a gym visit for "anything that gets your heart rate up for thirty minutes," a morning call to his kids on the way to school, and an uninterrupted block of time at home with his family on Sundays.

Half an hour earlier, Rubio had been

on "Good Morning America," talking about his finances, but the story seemed to be dying down—there weren't many Americans who cared.

I suspected he might have more difficulty defusing concern that he is becoming indebted to powerful donors—some of the very same "people that can afford to influence the government," whom he disparaged in his speech at St. Christopher. More than four in five Americans—an equal share of Republicans and Democrats—believe that money plays too large a role in political campaigns, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll released in June. While Rubio was getting help from Singer, and perhaps Adelson, a nonprofit group called the Conservative Solutions Project—which, by law, can conceal the identities of its donors—was running millions of dollars' worth of ads promoting him, more than any similar group devoted to a Presidential candidate.

I asked Rubio if he thinks Americans will worry that he is beholden to big backers. He shook his head, and said, "I've never had a single donor come to me and say, 'I'll support you, but only if you support this initiative.'"

I said that sounded like a false standard, an unrealistic description of political influence. He continued, "People may not believe this, but the vast majority of big donors in America don't really ask a lot of government—at least on our side of the aisle. What they really, largely, want is to be treated fairly and be left alone." He added, "I've never changed any item on my agenda in search of a supporter."

On several issues, Rubio has taken a position that suits the faithful in the primaries but is guaranteed to repel voters in a general election. His most obvious vulnerability is on abortion. In the first Republican debate, Rubio said that his opposition to abortion extends to cases of rape or incest—a position at odds with that of more than three-quarters of Americans. Axelrod told me, "No exceptions is a position so extreme that no Republican candidate has ever held it. Presidential races are defined by moments. Maybe he will try to amend that position, but in the age of video it's hard to extinguish a declarative statement like that." When I asked Rubio about it, he said, somewhat confusingly, "Look, I personally believe that all life is worthy of protection, and therefore I don't ever require, nor have I ever advocated, that I won't support a law unless it has exceptions." After some more twists and turns, I sensed that we had reached the line he plans to use in a general election: "My goal is to save as many lives as possible, and I'll support anything that does that. Even if it has exceptions."

During the third debate, he had said that it was time to end an immigration system based largely on family ties. "That's the way my parents came, legally, in 1956, but in 2015 we have a very different economy. Our legal-immigration system from now on has to be merit-based." I told him that people have said that he is, in effect, pulling up the ladder after his family has reached safety.

"I understand the argument," he said, but he thought it was unfair. "In 1956, two people with barely any command of English, who had no formal education of any sort, were able to find jobs. In the twenty-first century, those jobs are scarce. . . . So I don't think, for the country, it makes sense



to continue to allow people to immigrate here in large numbers who we know do not have the skills or the education they need to succeed economically. It's just a change based on new economic reality."

I asked what he thought would have happened to his parents if they had faced the system he is proposing. "It's not clear what would have happened to them," he said. "We can all get into hypotheticals about what would have happened two hundred years ago, or one hundred years ago, or fifty years ago, when somebody's relatives came, but the world changes, and our policy has to keep pace with that." He seemed dissatisfied with that answer, and went on, "Unlike most of the other people running, I live surrounded by immigration. My family are all immigrants. My kids go to school with kids who are immigrants. So this is not a theoretical issue for me. I live it personally. And it is hard. You know the stories of people that are here illegally, but it's heartbreaking, because they came because they don't want their daughter to be abducted by a drug gang in Central America. But the flip side of it is, every country in the world has immigration laws. And America has to have immigration laws, and if you don't enforce them you don't have laws. So this notion that somehow to be compassionate you have to be lawless is something I don't buy, and I think most Hispanics don't buy it."

Rubio's campaign faces a range of tactical questions—Does he have the organization to win an early state? Will he lose his home state to Trump? Could Cruz win with only conservative and evangelical voters?—but the larger question will be harder to solve: Rubio has succeeded in politics by straddling as many positions as possible. He is the Catholic at the Protestant church, the quarterback of both teams, the *joven viejo*. But it isn't clear that he can continue to do that and also be as bold as he would need to be to alter the Presidential prospects of the Republican Party in a changing country.

Since entering the primary, he had redoubled his language about enforcement. In October, he co-sponsored a bill that would punish "sanctuary" cities—localities that have objected to

enforcing federal immigration laws. Democrats dubbed it the Trump-Rubio Sanctuary Cities Bill.

If Rubio makes it to the general election, some of his positions are unlikely to budge. Hillary Clinton favors an activist American foreign policy, and Rubio mentioned to me that he was rereading "The Last Lion," by William Manchester. He said, "It's this book about Churchill. It's really long. Only because I'm just so fascinated by the leadership he provided." He went on, "Churchill was a guy who was largely ignored through much of the thirties as a warmonger, and a guy that was crying wolf, and Chamberlain was this heroic figure that was going to achieve peace in our time by diplomacy. And I think, in many cases, we're kind of at a similar moment, where many of us, including myself, are warning about dangers that are percolating around the world and what they could turn into. Whether it's Iran, Russia, China, North Korea, or radical Islam."

In retrospect, those were the final moments of a phase in the Presidential campaign: when Islamic State militants assaulted Paris on November 13th, the candidates lurched away from talk of taxes and Wall Street regulations to face questions of national security. Jeb Bush, after straining, for months, to distance himself from his brother's invasion of Iraq, said, "We should declare war" on the Islamic State, and called for the deployment of American troops "without their hands tied." In a Democratic debate on the day after the attacks, Clinton said that the Islamic State "cannot be contained—it must be defeated." She declined to identify the threat as "radical Islam," saying that the term was "painting with too broad a brush" and risked alienating allies in the Muslim world.

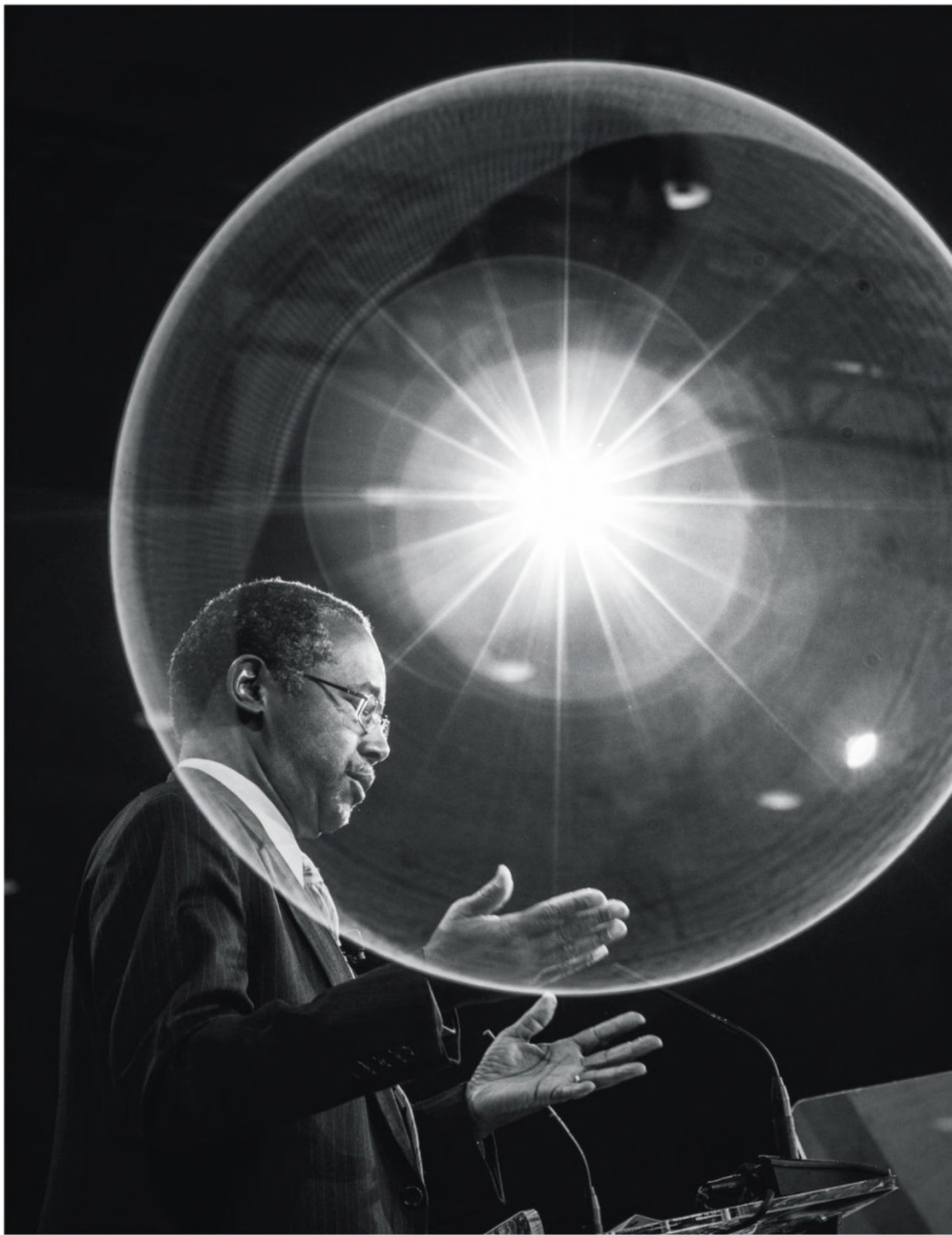
Rubio held up that point as a flawed gesture of diplomacy. "I don't understand it," he said on ABC's "This Week," the next day. "That would be like saying we weren't at war with Nazis, because we were afraid to offend some Germans who may have been members of the Nazi Party but weren't violent themselves." It was a shrewd reply—the cool placement of safety over diplomacy—that nevertheless

avoided Bush's sharp turn toward war.

But in reaching for a broad rhetorical vision Rubio presaged an instinct for aggressive intervention. "This is a clash of civilizations," he told ABC. "There is no middle ground on this. Either they win or we win." It was the politics of absolutes, a vocabulary that harks back to the with-us-or-against-us logic of an earlier era. Even George W. Bush disavowed the clash-of-civilizations argument. Rubio stopped short of specifying how many troops he wants to send to the Middle East, but he left no doubt that he believes such action is unavoidable. In an article that Rubio wrote for Politico, he said that the United States should "provide direct military support to Sunnis and the Kurds if Baghdad fails to support them." He also called for no-fly zones in Syria, for grounding Bashar al-Assad's Air Force, and for the establishment of "safe zones" to "stem the flow of refugees and provide a place to train and arm rebel fighters." He said that he would "oppose Russia and Iran" in their efforts to buttress Assad's regime.

In one of our conversations, I asked Rubio if his instinct for intervention was out of step with a generation that is exhausted by war and confrontation, young men and women who have come of age in the years since September 11th. He responded instantly: "We're not Luxembourg. We're the United States of America—the highest-profile, most important, most influential country in the world." He went on, "And we may ignore problems that exist far away, but those problems don't ignore us. America, in the world today, is the only nation capable of convening collective action."

Barely two months before the first Iowa caucus, the debates about national security and immigration were converging in ways that Rubio seemed well positioned to exploit. In the days after the Paris attacks, more than thirty governors said that their states would resist the resettlement of Syrian refugees. Rubio, as he so often does, found a way to embrace two sides of a painful question, expressing both empathy and tough-mindedness. He said of the refugees, "It's not that we don't want to—it's that we can't." ♦



*Many people think of Carson primarily as a religious figure. His policy positions, which are often vague or confusing, matter less to voters*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PETERSON





THE POLITICAL SCENE

# A WING AND A PRAYER

*The unlikely success of Ben Carson's improvisatory campaign.*

BY KELEFA SANNEH

The keynote speaker at the annual National Prayer Breakfast, in Washington, D.C., is expected to be an agile performer: a preacher, but a nondenominational one; an orator, but a nonpartisan one. In 1997, the speaker was Benjamin Solomon Carson, who was both an accomplished pediatric neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins University and, unlike most pediatric neurosurgeons, something of a celebrity. Ten years before, he had separated twins who were joined at the head, and he used the attention that followed to establish himself as a writer and inspirational figure. He grew up poor and black in Detroit, the son of a single mother who, he likes to remind audiences, could barely read. And he has a knack, common to great motivators, for making his accomplishments seem both extraordinary and achievable.

"I don't feel that I really belong here," Carson said, when he took the lectern, but his casual posture and gentle smile suggested that he knew he did. The anecdotes he dispensed had been polished smooth over the decades, and they helped him administer a carefully calibrated dose of political and spiritual incitement. He lamented the secularization of American society, asserting that religious faith was no longer acceptable in political discourse. "If it's in our Constitution, it's in our Pledge, it's in our courts, and it's on our money, but we're not supposed to talk about it, what is that?" he asked. "That's schizophrenia!" But he also delivered a black-history lesson, enumerating a long list of African-American inventors who were, he said, absent from school textbooks, thereby depriving young black men of role models. Midway through his talk, he issued a whimsical—and bipartisan—call to action. "What if everybody in this room, with all your influence, wrote a letter to Kellogg's and General Mills and said, 'Put on your cereal boxes Nobel Prize winners and people of intellect, instead of just people who use sports and entertainment,'" he said. "Those kinds of things, I think, will make a big difference." When he was finished, Bill and Hillary Clinton stood up to applaud, and they pumped his hand as he returned to his seat.

Perhaps President Obama was expecting a similar performance when he

REDUX

*than the opportunity he offers them to become characters in his uplifting story.*

settled in for Carson's encore appearance at the National Prayer Breakfast, in February, 2013. But by then Carson's political vision had come into sharper focus. The political pundit and entrepreneur Armstrong Williams, a longtime friend and adviser of Carson's who is currently his business manager, remembers watching Carson "agonizing" in the greenroom, as he tried to decide whether, and how much, he should criticize the President. In the end, Carson decided not to single out Obama, but he offered a strongly divergent view of America's problems and potential solutions: he sounded an alarm about the national debt; he called for a strictly proportional income tax, based on the Biblical principle of tithing; and he laid out a health-care reform plan, which he said would reduce "bureaucracy"—a veiled reference, perhaps, to Obama's Affordable Care Act. The speech became an online sensation, partly thanks to its unnamed target, who stopped smiling about halfway through and skipped an opportunity for a post-speech handshake. Clips have amassed millions of views on YouTube: "Obama Destroyed by Dr. Benjamin Carson's Amazing Speech"; "Dr. Benjamin Carson Wipes the Smile off Obama's Face." (Among Carson's fans, his honorific often serves as a term of affection.) And the speech inspired the *Wall Street Journal* to issue the first major endorsement of the 2016 campaign cycle: "BEN CARSON FOR PRESIDENT."

The *Journal* editorial wasn't actually intended as a Presidential endorsement; it was a jocular salute to a newly minted folk hero, and a mischievous suggestion that even this political layman was more sensible than Obama. But the cult of Carson grew, aided by the formation of the National Draft Ben Carson for President Committee, and by tacit encouragement from Carson, who seemed to enjoy the speculation. Soon after the speech, he announced that he was retiring from neurosurgery and hinted that he was considering public office. This May, after two years of contemplation, he declared that he was running. He recalled praying for guidance.

"Lord, I don't want to do this," he said. "But if you're going to open the doors I will go through with it."

During a recent appearance at a retirement community in Exeter, New Hampshire, Carson, who is sixty-four, was interrupted by residents making a common complaint: he was speaking too softly. He adjusted the microphone and leaned into it. "I can't get it any higher," he said. "It would be in my mouth." And then he returned to his subject, which was the dire prospect of a country in which citizens were afraid to criticize their government. "Back in Nazi Germany, a lot of those people did not believe in what Hitler was doing," he said. "They kept their mouths shut and they kept their heads down. And look at what happened." Carson has an ability—honed, no doubt, during his previous career—to deliver alarming statements in a soothing manner. "Some people say, 'Oh, nothing like that could ever happen in America,'" he said. "I beg to differ." When he speaks, Carson sometimes blinks slowly, or closes his eyes in thought, and he uttered this last phrase in the same tone of voice that you might use to recount a pleasant dream.

When Carson announced his candidacy, he was overshadowed by Jeb Bush, who was viewed as the favorite, and then by Donald Trump, whose groundswell began a few weeks later.

But Carson kept speaking, quietly. Ryan Rhodes, Carson's Iowa state director, says that the candidate's "soft touch" is particularly effective among women voters and Evangelicals. By this fall, national polls showed Carson catching Trump, and even overtaking him. In some

ways, this is not a particularly meaningful achievement: national polls, conducted long before the primary season has begun, have little predictive power. (At this point four years ago, Newt Gingrich was the front-runner.) And Carson's big numbers have had little effect on the skepticism of political experts, who continue to believe that the next President will be a professional politician; Marco Rubio emerged as the betting favorite for the nomination, de-

spite polling about half as well as Carson. Even so, it's hard to think about the crowded cluster of Republican candidates for President without considering the startling fact that, for months, none were able to command much more support than a former surgeon whose campaign platform is barely more granular than the speech that made him a conservative hero three years ago.

Like most popular political candidates, Carson promises to deliver his audiences from politics. At campaign rallies, he gets a warm ovation when he inveighs against the nameless forces of division. ("They want Democrats to believe that Republicans are evil," he says. "Or Republicans to believe that Democrats are evil.") But that doesn't make him a moderate. In Exeter, he condemned Planned Parenthood, saying that he would rather direct federal funding to "organizations that don't engage in killing babies." A few hours later, at the Durham campus of the University of New Hampshire, he warned about the peril of "global jihadists" and said, "There are many of them, already, within our nation." That evening, he travelled to a boathouse on Goat Island, off the Portsmouth coast, where a group of local doctors had gathered to slurp milky clam chowder and listen to a former colleague share his belief that physicians should use their "healing instinct" to revive the country. Carson was in his element, joking about the hassles of dunning insurance companies and mentioning, briefly, his interest in trigeminal neuralgia. But even there he stayed on message: when a man in the audience asked about the rising cost of medical school, Carson suggested making colleges pay the interest on student loans, to help keep down tuition, yet firmly rejected the idea of universal government-funded college education. "Anything that we do to add to the debt right now is almost like treason," he said.

During the Obama years, there has been no shortage of conservative leaders eager to squeeze the words "debt" and "treason" into the same sentence. And there are moments when Carson seems almost retro, thrilling audiences with an anti-deficit, anti-Obamacare message that had already started to lose its freshness when he delivered that





famous speech. What distinguishes Carson from his Tea Party predecessors is his biography, which also distinguishes him from the rest of the Republican field: he has been telling and retelling his life story for nearly thirty years, hewing to a narrative that emphasizes the Biblical virtues of grace and humility. Other candidates in the race, with the notable exception of Trump, have been reluctant to criticize someone so well loved, perhaps because they don't view Carson as a long-term threat. In the most recent Republican debate, the other candidates not only refrained from trying to hurt Carson but seemed eager to help him. After he gave a meandering soliloquy in response to a question about banks, Rubio took it upon himself to implement a Troubled Assertion Relief Program, exclaiming, "He's right on point, there."

Journalists haven't been quite so supportive: BuzzFeed recently posted an old video of Carson suggesting, in defiance of archeological scholarship, that the Egyptian pyramids were actually grain-storage units, built by the Biblical patriarch Joseph. During an excruciating Fox News interview after the Paris attacks, Chris Wallace tried and failed to get Carson to tell him which countries he would recruit to help fight ISIS. (Carson promised to involve "all of the Arab states—and even the non-Arab states.") Last week, on an Iowa television station, Carson called his foreign-policy education "an ongoing process." Two days later, he talked about the importance of screening refugees, using an infelicitous analogy: "If there's a rabid dog running around your neighborhood, you're probably not going to assume something good about that dog."

At times, the scrutiny has led Carson to engage in atypically peevish exchanges with the media. Williams, his adviser, has been heartened by Carson's willingness to fight back. "Somebody's attacking your good name, your word," he says. "He *needs* to get emotional. He *needs* to get fire in his belly." It would make sense for any other politician to react this way, but Carson's appeal is based largely on his seeming to be above the fray: a Baptist youth minister in Florida told me that he admired Carson because he was humble,



## THE RE-GIVING TREE

and not "bombastic and adversarial"; a volunteer in Iowa cited his pledge to work for "all the people," including the ones who wouldn't vote for him. The most suspenseful thing about his surreal campaign is seeing how long he can stay in the fight without looking too much like a fighter.

Carson certainly seemed serene on a recent Tuesday afternoon in Florida, sitting in his temporary living room aboard a chartered bus emblazoned with his face; his head was framed by a backward "D" on the window behind him, the last letter of "BEN CARSON, M.D." His wife, Candy, emerged from a private room in the back to show Carson a message on her mobile phone, and then disappeared. Carson pointed out that he is used to travelling a lot, and that he has been contending with big crowds for years. "When people would come to the clinic, they always would come with their cameras and their books to be autographed," he told me. "The magnitude has just increased exponentially." His campaign has followed an aston-

ishing trajectory, but so has his life; he published his autobiography, "Gifted Hands," in 1990, and it reads like an extended parable. He writes that his mother, Sonya, was a domestic worker, and sometimes left Ben and his older brother, Curtis, with neighbors while she sought clinical help for "confusion and depression"; his father, an auto-worker and part-time preacher, left the family when Carson was eight.

Carson was raised in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church—he was baptized at eight and again, for good measure, at twelve—and he has remained a member. His surgical skill seems, in his telling, like a compensatory gift from God: afflicted with poor eyesight, he discovered that he had a knack for spatial visualization, making him well suited to navigate the delicate tangle of a child's brain. Like many Adventists, Carson is a vegetarian, though he downplays any differences between Adventists and other Christians. Decades ago, in an interview in *Vegetarian Times*, he expressed certainty that meat eating would fade away by 2010, and

that animals would “breathe a sigh of relief.” But, on the bus in Florida, he was eager to explain that his diet is merely a personal choice, and that he has nothing against meat eaters or hunters. He offered a brief explanation of his church’s best-known tenet. “There’s no place in the Bible that says the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday, so we worship on Saturday, that’s all,” he said. “Does that mean that people who worship on Sunday are evil? No! Of course not.”

In “Gifted Hands,” Carson recalls the two years that he and his brother spent in Boston, living with his mother’s sister: he remembered “winos and drunks,” as well as “squad cars racing up the street.” At the retirement community in Exeter, he added grislier details, saying, “I saw people lying on the street with bullet holes and stab wounds.” The *Boston Globe* talked to longtime residents of the neighborhoods where Carson lived, who remembered a less menacing atmosphere; one called the claim

of bodies in the streets a “vast exaggeration.” Of course, Carson’s exaggeration, if that’s what it is, surely wouldn’t seem so vast if he were not a Presidential candidate; one suspects that few motivational speakers would emerge unscathed from an encounter with a pack of investigative reporters.

A number of Carson’s favorite anecdotes seem impervious to research. When he tells his life story, he rarely omits the moment when, at the age of fourteen, he tried to stab another boy with a camping knife; he struck the boy’s belt buckle, the blade “snapped and dropped to the ground,” and Carson retreated to a bathroom, where he begged God to rid him of his violent temper. In Carson’s telling, the prayer worked. “Since that day,” he wrote, “I have never had a problem with my temper.” It says something about Carson’s reputation that reporters have grown suspicious not of his redemption but of his original sin: CNN talked to former friends and classmates and noted,

solemnly, that “the violent, impulsive person Carson has described himself as is unrecognizable to them.” Similarly, Carson often talks about a moment of rage when he attacked his mother with a hammer, but, in 1988, the *Detroit Free Press* published an article in which Carson’s mother recalled the altercation differently. In her version, it was she who wielded the hammer, and might have used it, if Curtis had not intervened.

The most damaging potential debunking is also the least clear-cut. Carson was part of the R.O.T.C. program in high school, and in “Gifted Hands” he remembers being “offered a full scholarship to West Point.” But, earlier this month, *Politico* reported that Carson’s campaign had “admitted” that “a central point in his inspirational personal story was fabricated”: he had never applied to West Point, let alone been accepted, and the school does not charge tuition. But Carson had never mentioned applying, and so *Politico*, under pressure, softened its language, saying only that Carson “conceded that he never applied nor was granted admission.” Since then, the controversy has grown more obscure—it is now an argument over what “offered” means, and whether a West Point representative might have made some encouraging remarks that Carson misinterpreted. In a press conference, he called the reports a “witch hunt.” Raising his voice (possibly for the first time all year), he claimed that Obama had not faced similar scrutiny. “There is a desperation, on behalf of some, to try to find a way to tarnish me,” he said, dejectedly—unlike Trump, Carson takes no visible pleasure in tangling with the media. “It’s just ridiculous!”

For Carson, being attacked is a relatively new experience. In the years after “Gifted Hands” was published, he turned his autobiography into an industry. He embarked upon a never-ending speaking tour and founded a charity, the Carson Scholars Fund, which has recognized more than six thousand students for their “academic achievement and humanitarian qualities.” His book spawned nine sequels, and also two documentaries, a cable-television feature film (starring Cuba Gooding, Jr.), and a long-running play in Baltimore, which



*“My life has become a tangled web of fictitious user names and fiendishly clever passwords.”*



was often performed for schoolchildren judged to be in need of supplementary edification. The legend of Dr. Carson was ubiquitous in the predominantly African-American schools of Baltimore. (The essayist Ta-Nehisi Coates, who grew up there, wrote, of Carson, “I saw him speak so many times that I began to have that ‘This guy again?’ feeling.”) It was ubiquitous, too, in many churches around the country, where Carson’s story served as proof that faith could conquer all. Many of the people who wait in line to hear his stump speech think of him primarily as a religious figure, which is part of the reason that the media skepticism hasn’t harmed him. Like his policy positions, which are often vague or confusing, the precise details of his biography matter less to voters than the opportunity he offers them to become characters in his uplifting story.

**I**n “Gifted Hands,” politics rarely intrudes. Carson joined his high school R.O.T.C. program in 1967, a few months before the Detroit riots, but the book makes no mention of them, or of the uproar over the Vietnam War, or of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Carson recently told the *Wall Street Journal* that, during the riots inspired by King’s assassination, he sheltered some white students in the high-school biology lab, although the *Journal* could not find anyone to corroborate this story.) Carson says that he was brought up to be “a fairly partisan Democrat,” but he evidently wasn’t much interested in activism. He attended Yale during a tumultuous period: in 1970, near the end of his freshman year, the campus was overtaken by protests that accompanied the trials of members of the Black Panther Party, who were accused of murder. (Hillary Clinton, then studying at Yale Law School, served as a liaison to the group that planned the protests.) But his campus life seems to have revolved mainly around Candy, his wife, a fellow-student who was also from Detroit. She is the author of a forthcoming book about their marriage, the co-author of his last three books, the leader of the Carson family string quartet (they have three grown sons, who fill out the lineup), and, he often says, the only woman he has ever been with. One of the black student leaders

in those days at Yale, Kurt Schmoke, says that Carson was not among the rabble-rousers. “The Ben Carson I knew in college was a very studious person—focussed like a laser beam on going to medical school,” he says.

Carson got his medical degree from the University of Michigan and, in 1977, arrived at Johns Hopkins, where he became known as a precise but imaginative surgeon. Readers who have heard about his life-saving feats might be surprised to learn, in “Gifted Hands,” how many of his best-known surgeries ended in disaster, or in a more equivocal result. Benjamin and Patrick Binder, the German twins who played such a large role in Carson’s career, were seven months old when the operation took place: Carson and his team had to temporarily induce hypothermic arrest so that they could disentangle the interlaced blood vessels before the babies bled out. Both survived the operation, but they suffered brain damage, and one has since died. One of the things Carson learned is how not to become paralyzed by self-doubt. He likes to say that he has performed fifteen thousand surgeries, which would mean an average of more than one a day, for more than three decades.

In Baltimore, Carson was a friend and ally of Schmoke, the former student leader, who transformed his activism into a career in elected politics: from 1987 until 1999, he served as the Democratic mayor of Baltimore, and he and Carson often talked about ways to support young people in the city. At one point, when a Democratic gubernatorial candidate sought Carson’s endorsement, Schmoke urged him to decline, so as not to damage his spotless reputation. “I guess I thought that his story was above partisan politics,” Schmoke says now, chuckling. Back then, Carson liked being politically uncategorizable. In his book “The Big Picture,” published in 1999, he noted with satisfaction that he had once heard hosts on a radio show arguing over whether or not he supported Louis Farrakhan’s Million Man March. Carson conspicuously declined to settle the question. Elsewhere in the book, he preemptively defended himself against the suggestion that he was a conservative Republican. “I’m not,” he wrote, adding that he would accept

no political label more restrictive than “independent.”

Schmoke remembers the day, some years ago, when Carson casually mentioned that he was skeptical of the scientific consensus on evolution. Schmoke thought he was joking, but Carson made clear that he wasn’t. “I said to myself, ‘Gosh, there must be a lot of things that Ben believes that I’ve never talked to him about,’” Schmoke recalls. Carson now says that his political outlook began to shift in the nineteen-eighties, when he found himself captivated by President Reagan’s message of “self-empowerment.” That became Carson’s message, too, although for many years he delivered it in nonpolitical terms. “Gifted Hands” begins with a letter from Carson’s mother, who reprises one of her favorite phrases: “If you don’t succeed, you have only yourself to blame.” In one passage, Carson declares that it is time for “minorities” to “stand on our own feet and refuse to look to anybody else to save us.” But later, in a discussion of “disadvantaged kids,” he suggests that there is “a system precluding these people from achieving.” Of course, self-help and systemic change need not be mutually exclusive. And, anyway, as a surgeon and motivational speaker Carson didn’t have to choose.

Carson registered as a Republican only a year ago, as he considered running for President. By all accounts, it was the battle over health care that pushed him to finally embrace a political party. In 2004, President George W. Bush appointed Carson to his Council on Bioethics, and Carson began thinking more seriously about how the federal government might rein in the insurance industry, which seemed to him to consume too much of the nation’s medical spending. At a town-hall meeting in 2005, organized by the Congressional Black Caucus, he suggested a health-care system modelled on “something that already works”: the food-stamp program. (He liked the idea that recipients could shop for medical care, just as food-stamp recipients shop for groceries.) Two years later, at a council meeting, Carson suggested that, if insurance could be made more affordable, universal coverage could be achieved by fiat. He said, “There is where the government perhaps comes

in and makes it mandatory, just like it's mandatory for you to have automobile insurance."

These ideas don't seem radically at odds with the reform bill that President Obama eventually passed. But as the debate over the Affordable Care Act began, in 2009, Carson was dismayed to find himself shut out of the process: Obama disbanded Bush's Council on Bioethics, and Carson tried in vain to secure a Presidential meeting. "It left him very disappointed, and devastated," Williams says. The 2013 Prayer Breakfast speech was an expression of frustration, and also a final attempt to get through to a President who seemed intent on ignoring Carson's expertise. On the campaign trail, Carson rarely fails to mention his idea for "health savings accounts," which would be personal and shareable: family members could contribute to each other's medical bills, and seniors might pass on leftover funds to their descendants. He hasn't fully explained how these accounts would be set up, or what would happen to patients who depleted theirs. Even more than the competition, he is devout in his belief that systemic problems can be solved by topical applications of common sense.

By the time Carson launched his campaign, he had completed his evolution from Democrat to independent to eager exponent of movement conservatism. He evinced a newfound passion for gun rights. And although the Adventist Church suggests that in some "exceptional circumstances" a woman might justifiably choose to terminate a pregnancy, Carson is now "unabashedly and entirely pro-life." Like any successful speaker, Carson knows how to read a room, and he admits that his transformation has been aided by his recent immersion in politics, and by the receptive audience that he has found among conservatives. He has emerged, for instance, as an advocate of tightened immigration laws, arguing that children born in the U.S. to unauthorized immigrants shouldn't be given citizenship. "In talking to a lot of Americans, I realized how strongly they feel about people who come here illegally, and I think that probably has influenced me," he says. "Because if you want to be a representative of the

people, in a republic-type government, then obviously you have to represent what they feel."

When Carson's bus arrives at an event, his supporters often break into applause, although some find other ways to express themselves. In Waterloo, Iowa, a woman hopped in place, in anticipation of being in his presence; more than one fan, after shaking his hand, bent over and wept. In Florida, the crowds included eager teen-agers and shuffling seniors but only a small number of African-Americans. Carson occasionally acknowledges that his ideological journey has put him at odds with black voters, who play a vanishingly small role in the modern Republican Party. On the bus, which was trundling from his hotel, in Clearwater, to a Barnes & Noble in Tampa, Carson thought about how, exactly, Democrats manage to win so many African-American votes. "Don't you think Lyndon Johnson had it right?" he said. "I'm sure you've heard his quote where he said, 'Give those N-words a few goodies and we'll have their vote for the next two hundred years.'" The quote comes, lightly paraphrased, from a book by Ronald Kessler, who attributes it to a former Air Force One steward, who said that he overheard a conversation between Johnson and "two governors." The line is meant to illuminate the cynicism of Democratic politicians, although, by crediting it, Carson can't help but belittle the intelligence of African-American voters, too. This tactic is common in politics, where leaders often devise patronizing explanations for the otherwise unaccountable fact that people sometimes vote for their opponents. (Think of Obama's claim, during the 2008 campaign, that inhabitants of depressed towns "cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them.") But the notion of black voters as dupes for white politicians has a particularly nettlesome history in the U.S., stretching back to Reconstruction; nowadays, some Republican politicians prefer to simply say, instead, that their party needs to get better at reaching out.

Because Carson is African-American, he need not be so circumspect—one of his advantages is his willingness to talk about race in language that his

rivals would be wise to avoid. He has called Obamacare "the worst thing that has happened in this nation since slavery," and has said, of abortion, "I think it's a moral issue—just like slavery was a moral issue." While blasting Planned Parenthood, he asserted that its founder, Margaret Sanger, "believed that people like me should be eliminated or kept under control." (Sanger did suggest preventing "feeble-minded" people from having children, but there is no evidence that she supported sterilization on the basis of race.) Some of his gentler formulations, too, convey a coded racial appeal: Carson often excites largely white audiences by sketching a vision of racial harmony, just as Obama once did. When he tells crowds that "our unity is what provides our strength," he could be echoing Obama's famous claim, from the 2004 speech that made him a national figure, that "there's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there's the United States of America."

Some of Carson's biggest supporters see race as an important part of his appeal. Unlike Obama—and, for that matter, Herman Cain, the African-American businessman who briefly captivated Republican voters during the 2012 campaign—Carson entered this race as a figure well known and widely admired in African-American communities. John Philip Sousa IV, the leader of an unaffiliated pro-Carson political-action committee, is the author of "Ben Carson: Rx for America," a slim paperback that is given out free at Carson events. (The front cover announces, "Over 1,000,000 in Print!") Sousa, a great-grandson of the composer, argues that Carson could attract a significant minority of the African-American vote, enough to make a Democratic victory mathematically impossible; a Carson Presidency, he argues, would "forever destroy" the "false narrative that conservatives and Republicans are racists."

There is something paradoxical about Sousa's argument, which urges Republican voters to agree that race matters in order to demonstrate that it really doesn't. As Carson's audience has changed, he has modified how he talks about race, in ways that make him more



acceptable to the party he recently joined. Writing in 1999, he affirmed his belief that “our justice system metes out different treatment to blacks and whites,” and declared that police in a Detroit suburb had recently arrested his mother and impounded her car, because she matched the description of a suspect. Now he suggests that African-American frustration with the criminal justice system is misdirected. “I just don’t agree that that’s where the emphasis needs to be,” he says.

At times, there are signs of tension between Carson’s old life, as a community-minded motivator, and his new life, as a Republican favorite. During one recent appearance, his customary reminiscences of boyhood gave way to a memorable digression about the joys of throwing rocks at cars. “Everybody did it, because it was so much fun,” he said, and he chuckled at the thought of police officers scrambling to catch him and his friends. “Of course, that was back in the days before they would shoot you,” he said. He stopped himself. “I’m just kidding,” he said, adding that he had “a tremendous amount of respect for the police.” He paused to accept the crowd’s applause, and, back on safe ground, added that the police were “the very last people that we should be targeting.”

When Carson mentions racial uplift, he often adds a quick disclaimer, noting that his policies are meant “not only for African-Americans but for everybody.” Sitting on the bus, though, he advocated a kind of economic separatism. “If we would learn how to turn our dollars over in our own community, two or three times, before you send it out—that’s how you generate wealth,” he told me. “That’s how the Jews did it. That’s how the Koreans did it.” Half a century earlier, Malcolm X made a strikingly similar argument, saying, “If we try and establish some industry in our own community, then we’re developing to the position where we are creating employment for our own kind.” Of course, Malcolm X’s entreaty was accompanied by a caustic corollary that probably would not impress the Republican electorate. “Once you gain control of the economy of your own community,” he added, “then you don’t have to picket and boycott



*“Can you describe these countless wasted hours that ultimately make up the bulk of your life?”*

and beg some cracker downtown for a job in his business.”

If Carson has a specific pitch to African-American voters, it is indistinguishable from his general economic pitch. He wants to lower taxes for everyone in order to spur economic activity and raise interest rates, so that poor and middle-class families can earn more interest in their savings accounts. And he wants to allow corporations to repatriate overseas money, tax free, if they use ten per cent of it to “create jobs for unemployed people and people on welfare.” His campaign’s outreach to African-Americans has consisted largely of a radio advertisement featuring a hip-hop track that not even Carson seemed to enjoy. (“I probably would have taken a little different approach,” he said after it was released.) Maybe it doesn’t much matter, given the racially polarized state of American politics. Florida, for instance, is about seventeen per cent African-American, but exit polls conducted there in 2012 suggest that only about one in a hundred Mitt Romney voters was African-American. Sometime in the future, black voters might help Republi-

cans win the Presidency. But in this cycle it’s highly doubtful that they will help a Republican win the nomination.

Earlier this fall, Carson startled the press corps—and some of his own advisers—by cutting back on his campaign schedule so that he could promote his latest book, “A More Perfect Union,” in which his political platform takes the form of a constitutional exegesis. (Carson’s ten books all cover pretty much the same territory, and so some conceptual ingenuity is required to keep his bibliography growing.) The plan, which Carson explained by saying that he wanted to fulfill his obligations to his publisher, puzzled many observers; *National Review* posted a blog item under the headline “THIS ISN’T NORMAL.” And yet the book tour helped him—or, at any rate, didn’t hurt. During October, when he was mainly off the campaign trail, his popularity increased. National polls showed him in a virtual tie for first place, with Trump; in Iowa polls, for the first time, he was the front-runner. At book signings, hundreds and even thousands of fans lined up to



*"Thanksgiving shmanksgiving—we both know  
this is because I slept with your wife."*

buy a copy of "A More Perfect Union," have it signed, and maybe get a quick handshake. Carson apparently hasn't lost his surgical dexterity, because often he executed the handshake while holding an uncapped Sharpie in the same hand. At a Books-A-Million in Kissimmee, Florida, employees made sure that customers didn't linger for more than a few seconds, but one man brought the line to a halt. Bob Santos, a fellow-Adventist who had first heard about Carson through his church, had spent more than five hundred dollars on a basketful of Carson books, which he planned to distribute to friends and relatives. Once Carson had worked his way through the basket, Santos seemed exhilarated, even though he hadn't quite got everything he wanted. "I thought he was going to personalize one of them," Santos said. "He said he can't."

Before Carson's Presidential campaign was a campaign, it was a business—one largely independent of Carson himself. The Supreme Court's Citizens United decision allows political-action committees to be more or less unregulated, so long as they don't coordinate their activities with official campaigns. In December, 2013, Carson told potential supporters that none of the groups soliciting on

his behalf had his blessing, but the pro-Carson groups didn't need it. They kept making money and plowing it back into fund-raising, creating a virtuous and potentially lucrative cycle. The following year, as the National Draft Ben Carson for President Committee—run by Sousa and Vernon Robinson, a political entrepreneur—was raising millions, Armstrong Williams suggested that the organization was dishonest. "People giving money think it's going to Dr. Carson, and it's not," he said, adding, "I don't like misleading people."

Once Carson announced his candidacy—yielding, he said, to the people who had been "clamoring" for him to run—he had to make peace with the Carson industry. Williams now believes that the unaffiliated PACs are "not as exploitative" as he had thought, and concedes that they have played an important role in boosting Carson. Williams says that he is careful not to communicate with the Super PACs. (He suffered a scandal of his own, a decade ago: he was working as a syndicated columnist, and it was revealed that the Bush Administration had paid him to promote its No Child Left Behind Act.) This must require special vigilance, because his brother, Alvin Williams, runs Black

America's Political Action Committee, which solicits donations in order to "push Dr. Carson to victory."

The official campaign has proved adept at fund-raising, too, using expensive telephone and direct-mail solicitations to reach small donors. Last month, the Federal Election Commission reported that Carson's campaign had raised nearly twenty million dollars from donors who had given two hundred dollars or less—vastly more than any other Republican. Bush, Rubio, Ted Cruz, and Chris Christie have all attracted much more Super-PAC money than Carson, while Trump has attracted about as much as he seems to need, which is none. But, if individual donations were votes, Carson would be the people's choice.

This is partly a matter of strategy: Carson's campaign devotes an unusually large portion of its spending—more than fifty per cent—to fund-raising. It is also a result of Carson's status as a kind of conservative eminence, the kind of figure who makes people excited to put a check in the mail. At the Barnes & Noble in Tampa, Sousa's Super PAC was outside in the parking lot, selling T-shirts and giving away copies of his book. An independent vender was there, too, hawk-ing buttons. One showed Carson with hands clasped in prayer; another said, "Vote Republican—we can't ALL be on welfare!" An elderly man wandered through the store, gawking at the line of customers that snaked around the bookcases and outside into the muggy afternoon sun. "Is Ben Carson here?" he asked a store manager. "I'll probably vote for him—but I *hate* those annoying phone calls."

Carson's determination to do right by his publisher, Penguin, has fuelled speculation that he is more interested in making money than in becoming President. Indeed, Carson seems as proud of his business acumen as of his surgical skill—he often reminds voters that he has served on the board of both Kellogg and Costco, and promises to reinvigorate government by bringing in people he knows from "the business world." One of Carson's connections has caused him some trouble during the campaign: Mannatech, a multilevel-marketing company that sells nutritional supplements it calls "glyconutrients." In 2009, the company agreed to pay six million dollars to settle a suit, brought by the Texas



attorney general, which accused it of claiming that its products “cured, treated, or mitigated” a list of ailments that included cancer, autism, asthma, toxic-shock syndrome, and attention-deficit disorder. Carson has given speeches at Mannatech events, and he appeared in a regional public-television program about brain health, sponsored by Mannatech distributors, in which he stressed the importance of glyconutrients. When I asked about Mannatech, he said the company had behaved in a way that was “a little bit dishonest,” by uploading a promotional video he appeared in that was supposed to be available only to sales associates. But even now, when discussing the company’s product, Carson can’t help but offer a sales pitch. “I use it every day,” he told me. “Since I’ve been taking it, the incidence of me getting sick has *dramatically* declined.”

Many of Carson’s supporters are true believers: they earnestly explain how he and no other candidate could pull the country together. It can be harder to detect what Carson himself wants. Throughout the campaign, he has shown relatively little interest in the specifics of policy. His tax plan is more like a statement of general principles—he wants everyone to pay the same rate, but he hasn’t specified what that rate would be. And his foreign policy can seem like one long improvisation. During a recent debate, he responded to a question about Syria and Afghanistan with a confusing claim that “the Chinese” were active in the region; in the days afterward, the campaign clarified that Carson hadn’t meant to suggest that Chinese troops were present in Syria. At times like this, Carson’s insistence that he is a reluctant candidate can seem all too convincing—a few months before he officially announced, he told a medical journal, possibly in jest, that he would be relieved if he didn’t win. Williams remembers Carson saying, of the people urging him to run, “Maybe they see something in me that I don’t see.”

Most Republican strategists maintain that voters will eventually settle on a more conventional choice, chastened by the prospect of President Carson or, more likely, of another President Clinton. But the rise of unaccountable PACs has weakened the party élites, which

means that no one seems to have the credibility to tell the Republican base that nominating Carson might be a bad idea. The increasing messiness of the modern political primary has been, so far, a Republican story; this is in large part an accident of history. In Obama, the Democrats have had a leader who inspires loyalty. But in the next election cycle, or the one after it, the Democratic Party, too, may confront a base of voters eager for a candidate who has as little affection for politics as they do. Perhaps sober, élite-approved Presidential candidates, seasoned by decades of political experience, will come to seem as old-fashioned as network news anchors, and for some of the same reasons.

Carson is, even more than Trump, the ultimate 2016 outsider. In the years since the Prayer Breakfast, he has often played the role of soft-spoken firebrand, standing up for the core principles of conservatism. But one sometimes gets the sense that his ideological conversion is incomplete. The Club for Growth, a small-government think tank, often criticizes the timorousness of the Republican establishment, and it has been critical, too, of this year’s insurgents. The group’s Super PAC spent half a million dollars on a television ad to tell Iowa voters that Trump “supports higher taxes.” (The claim relied heavily on a Trump tax proposal from 1999; the Trump campaign responded with a cease-and-desist letter.) David McIntosh, the group’s president, says that he was alarmed by Carson’s suggestion, in a 2012 book, that it was possible to “extract socialism’s positive aspects and actually implement them within capitalism.” (Carson was referring to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and food stamps.) McIntosh is not reassured by Carson’s frequent paeans to liberty. “In the Republican primary, ‘free market’ and ‘less government’ are the buzzwords,” he says. “I think he may be using those, but they don’t really reflect a well-thought-out philosophy of the role of government.” The group says it is “unable to conclude that Ben Carson would be a pro-growth president,” but its Super PAC has not spent money attacking him, because it does

not view him as a serious threat. “As he gets closer to the election,” McIntosh says, “people will say, ‘I’m not sure he’s ready, yet, to be President.’”

Carson believes that readiness is overrated. “There’s no one person who knows everything,” he says, and he is confident in his ability to learn as he goes. But his struggles with difficult questions about governance have made that confidence harder to credit. There are signs that his popularity in Iowa is beginning to ebb—some polls suggest that Trump has regained a narrow lead there. Carson became a front-runner by deploying his motivational skills on his own behalf: he inspired Republican voters to believe that they could have any kind of President they wanted and that they did not need to settle for a mere politician. Now some of them may be realizing that there is no alternative to politics—no way for a retired neurosurgeon to become a Presidential candidate without becoming a politician, too.

In “Gifted Hands,” Carson admitted, “I don’t handle failure well,” although he added a humblebragging clarification: “I guess the Lord knows that, so He keeps it from happening to me often.” It’s not clear that he would regard an inability to win the Presidency as a failure. If the media interrogations grow too withering, or the polls too discouraging, Carson might happily return to a new version of his old life, talking and speaking a bit more about his journey out of Detroit, and a bit less about tax rates or military movements in Syria.

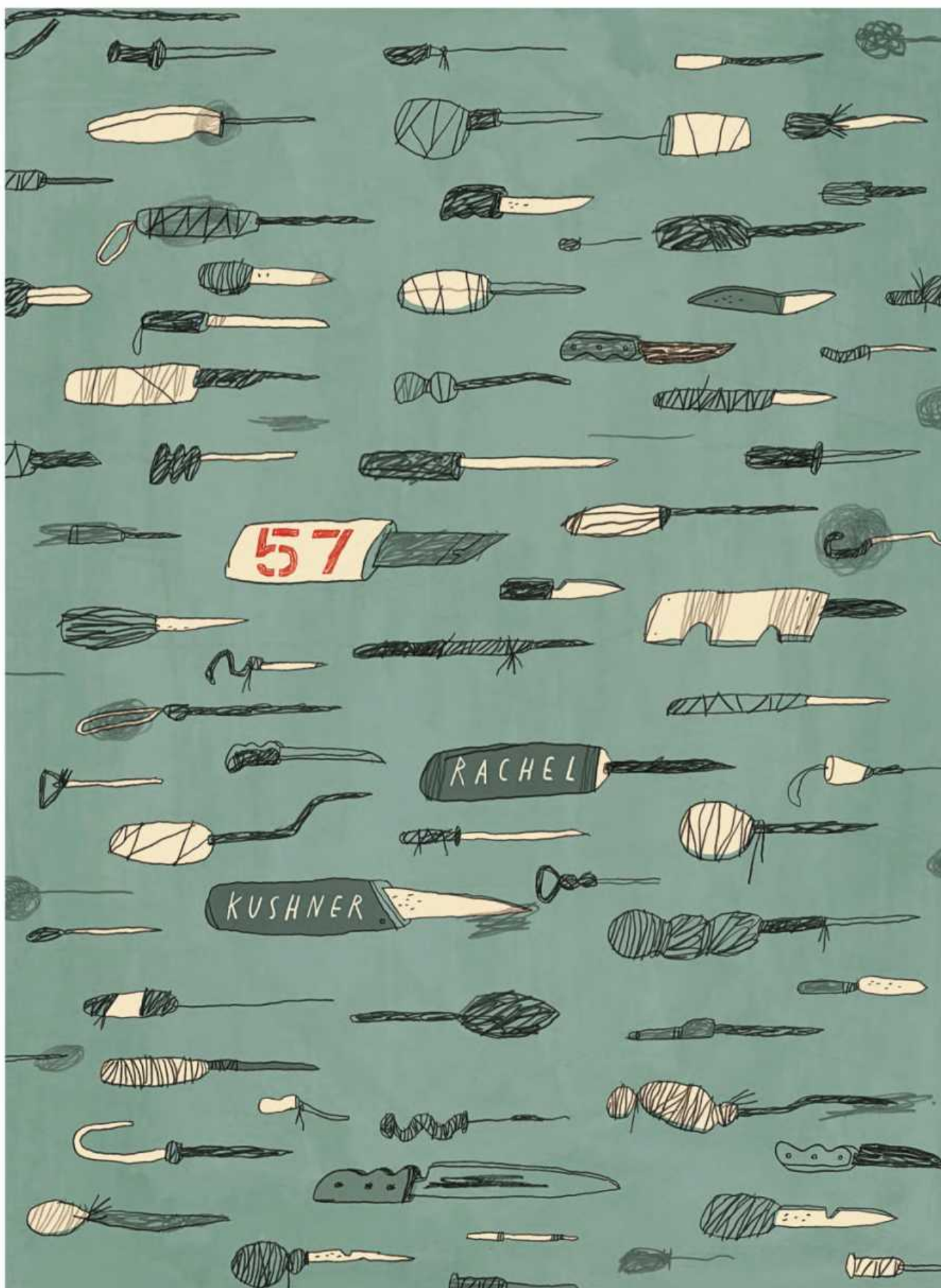
In the meantime, he is enjoying the crowds and the adulation. At a recent book event in Lakeland, Florida, fans filled the parking lot, and a book-tour staffer climbed onto Carson’s tour bus to photograph the scene. A small media pen had been set up near the portable lectern where Carson

was signing books, and he strolled over to take questions. One reporter wanted to know how he had been preparing for the next debate. “By listening to your questions,” Carson said.

“Are they good questions?”

“Some of ‘em are,” Carson said, chuckling, and then he walked back to the lectern, to sell a few hundred more books. ♦







They dropped him from I.R.C. so early the sky was black. He walked until he found himself stranded on the median of a freeway entrance, cars streaming toward him with their blinding lights, like a video game where the enemies come right at you, motherfuckers just keep coming straight at you one after the other, bam bam bam.

He faced the traffic, the cars racing by, machines with people in them who were not him. He was the one not in a machine, the one dumped before dawn from the county jail, and where were all these people going so early? No one stopped for him. Not a single car.

He got himself west and north. A bus, he thinks, but that part is hazy in his memory, although there was a long while where they pestered him about every detail, jabbing him with questions that he couldn't answer.

He knows this: by the afternoon of the day they released him he was somewhere in the random flux of the San Fernando Valley, with no phone and no numbers to call. It had been a short stint inside, three months, and now he was out and starting again from zero. No place to go, no bed to sleep in, no hustle of his own. He had nothing but needs, which were not a thing. At release, they'd given him the five dollars he had on his books and a shirt, because his was off him in the arrest.

They had been raiding and clearing tents from the Temple underpass, and he had tried to get past them and wound up eating the curb with a bloody face. From there, it had snowballed. Possession. Resisting arrest. Bench warrant for a case so stale he'd forgotten about it.

He was barred from skid row, where he knew how to live. He was on Sepulveda Boulevard, but it might as well have been Jupiter. He bought a can of soda from a street vender and a knife off another homeless guy outside a liquor store. He figured he needed something for protection, since he would be back on the streets. And he was thirsty, which was why he bought the soda, from one of the Mexicans with a cooler on wheels. A dirty cooler full of dirty ice and dripping cold cans of overpriced soda, but when it's your last few dollars you're not on a budget. It makes no difference how much the soda costs; you can't make the money last.

The girl, that was all they wanted to

know about, after it was all over and they'd picked him up again. The girl, the girl, the girl.

He was on the sidewalk when he saw her. She had her wallet out to put coins in a meter, and he figured the wallet had money in it.

This girl, he liked her is the truth. He liked the way her hair rolled all the way down her back in big curls, like water over rocks. He watched her lock the car and hit the button twice, like she wasn't sure she'd done it correctly. Everything about her seemed unsure and fragile, but she was open; that was what he sensed. He said, Hey, and she turned toward him without fear, despite everything—him, with the county wristband, filthy, soaked in sweat. She did not judge him, he could see. So he asked her nicely for some money. She said, with some kind of accent, that she had none, and opened her wallet so he could see that it was true. Her last coins had gone into the meter. They stood next to the car, a new Mercedes, the tall kind, for families, and from the looks of her he was sure she was connected to money and could get him some. She said, I have to pick up my baby daughter. That was when he introduced the knife, just kind of showed it to her.

He and she were in her car now. She was driving, and he took the knife out and touched her with it lightly. He was just managing her, making sure she did the things he said. He suggested they go to a bank machine—there was one up ahead and no people near it—and the girl looked afraid, but she remained calm. She said, I don't have bank cards. She had just arrived here, she said, from Hungary, and hadn't set up a bank account yet. The car belonged to her sister's husband. He grabbed her purse and rifled through it, and there was nothing, as she claimed. So they were on to some other plan, just whatever was next. That is, him telling her what was next, where to drive.

He had the knife pointed into her side. He didn't intend to hurt her. As soon as he could get something off her, he'd leave her alone, let her go.

They parked in an area under the freeway, because he saw women working the traffic at a nearby bus stop and figured he'd have this foreign girl suck someone off and get the money from it and buy a rock. But then that seemed like a stupid idea, because what if she

ran away or something, and the truth was he didn't know what he was doing or how to control her. Him just sprung that morning, and she should have been listening to him and doing what he told her, but she kept trying to reason with him and interfere. She said, Please let me go. Please. I have to get my baby before my sister goes to work. Her lips trembled like she was very cold, though it was hot. What he wanted was the simplest thing in the world: money. The shock of his frustration made her cry, and her crying put him in a rage.

He didn't mean to do it. He just needed her to understand. *I make the decisions here. It's what I say.*

For the record, he barely touched her. But she struggled, and so he didn't have a choice. He took her by the silky hair and knocked her head into the dash, and that was it. The car grew very quiet. You'd never know that kind of absolute quiet unless you'd experienced it.

He got on a bus, and then another bus to Union Station. Flashed his county wristband, which drivers knew to honor as fare. He wasn't supposed to be downtown—that was a condition of his release—but it was the only place where he knew how to function. He merged onto skid row, tried to forget his troubles and be like any other fool there, looking for some hustle or other, roving until something happened. But the quiet of the car stayed with him. Her car key was in his pocket. It was the key to the quiet of a thing you can't undo. Never once had he been able to undo anything. You want to take back what you've done, but you can't. They don't allow that.

Certain things he doesn't remember and other things he can't forget. Her putting coins into the meter slot. The mountains above, and a gritty kind of light. Smog, he means. The gritty sun and that huge, ugly boulevard, empty of people, like God was directing him almost. No one there to intervene.

And then him suddenly alone in the front seat of her car. Alone, but with her next to him, no longer alive.

He walked. His hands were in his pockets, and whenever he touched the key he had to remember how quiet it was in the car, so he threw it away, but before he knew it they had

him in detention, trying to get him to vomit up every single detail he could to account for who the hell he was and what the fuck he was up to, and they talked at him like that until he started answering.

They never gave him a break, just kept coming at him like cars on the freeway with their brights on. Endless questions to confirm that he really did the bad thing, and they even wanted him to come up with reasons, like was he angry, was he sad, did he need money? Did she resist? Did she fight back? Had he planned to do it? At what moment was it a plan? Can he say at what exact moment of the twenty-seven minutes he was with the girl he knew he was going to kill her? Did he never know? Did he simply get angry and yank like this? Or was it like this? How did he yank? And did he think he was yanking hard enough to kill her? To hurt her? To make her more compliant? And, after he yanked, was he aware that she was dead? When was he aware? What was on his mind? Who what when. Who what when where why. That was how they wanted you to read books in school. Divide up the parts of the story like a meal on a cafeteria tray.

He'd try to answer one question, and they'd use part of his answer to make his other answer wrong, and then he'd have to redo that answer, and that made a new question, and it was like trying to clean with a mop that only puts more stain on the floor. That was what it was. He could not outsmart them was the problem. They came at him from all sides, and used his own words to trick him into saying things he didn't mean, and in the end they wrote the confession and he signed and that was it.

The questions started all over again with his lawyer, but different ones. About him and his deep history. Did you ever witness a murder or a rape or an assault? And then he was telling the lawyer things. That his aunt was his mom because his mom had died, and that he'd watched at age five from the couch while his uncle or whatever he was, his aunt's person, beat her to death with a pipe, after which he was in a boys' home, where they fed him uncooked squares of ramen, and he would

open the little packet of flavoring for the soup and sprinkle it over his square brick of crunchy noodles. They didn't have gas to cook the noodles was why. And they kept telling him he was learning-disabled.

Where? the lawyer asked him. Who told you that?

The teachers, he said. They tested him and said he needed special classes, but someone had to sign and the group-home people only yelled, you could never ask them anything, and finally he left. He lived on the street, sleeping behind a dumpster near an overpass and going to school when he could manage it. But he was hungry and tired, and now they had him with new teachers who pretended he was deaf and dumb, and he thought, This is not my life. I'm not on the same people-mover. I'm on a different one. He spent his days wandering. Then, for a while, he had a safe and cozy place to sleep in the basement boiler room of a housing project in Chinatown. At first the people there seemed not to notice him, like he was invisible, maybe because they were old. Old people who shuffled and spoke only in Chinese. But it turned out that they were old people with guns. They pointed one at him and said not to come back, and that began his skid-row life.

Twelve years old, huffing glue out of a shared baggie, him and an old man in a wheelchair, and when he exhaled he felt the world finally start to relax and stretch and go soft. Just a little,



enough that the hours were bearable.

The old man who shared the glue was missing a leg. Said, I lost it from drinking too much juice, then laughed at the boy's confused look, this new knowledge that you could lose a limb from drinking juice. Don't worry, the old man said, you ain't gonna lose your leg. Kept laughing, one hand on the boy's shoulder, as he breathed deep from the bag.

It was not a Hollywood movie like

you see on the dayroom TV in jail. A story where he and the old man buddy up and meet a rich woman who thinks they should move into her mansion and raid her refrigerator. Or a movie where they buddy up and the old man finds out he's a millionaire by inheritance and adopts the boy and they go live on a horse ranch. Or a movie where the old man is actually a detective working undercover on the streets as a glue-sniffing hobo and he takes the boy home to his beautiful wife and they raise him to live right, and he goes to college and wears a suit and calls the old hobo Dad.

The old man is just one memory he still possesses, and probably he has it on account of the glue, not the man. It was wood glue, and it made him feel soft about the world and about himself for the first time in his life, and who knows what happened to that old man. He doesn't care. He was just some bum of the thousands on skid row. They weren't really people to him. They were just connections, hazards, problems, odors, crowding into his space under the overpass. The glow of a cigarette in the dark, the sound of yelling and arguments, because all people do on skid row is fight.

He exists now in the world of continuous noise that is prison life. A jangle of alarms and slamming and confusion, and inside it a pit of nothing.

He's life without parole, so that's it. This, into the future. The only changing thing is who bothers him and what they make him do. Can't take away good-time credit, since he's never getting out, and so he's useful. They make it do or die. That's how the gangs operate.

He jogs the track. Sweat dripping off him as he surveys the yard, its bad energies rolling and flowing, his mind a tunnel down which orders boom and echo, to comply or not to comply, depending.

He refuses to think about that girl any further than the fact that her death made people angry at him. He was angry already, so now everyone can see that the world is as ugly outside as it is for him inside, but if he could do it over, which he can't, he would just keep walking when he saw her feeding the meter with her coins. Not because it would change his life. Only God knows what might change



his life, and maybe not even God. But to prey on the weak, that was wrong. Although, in a way, he had thought of her as strong, not weak, because she was rich, and therefore lucky. But to make her light go out was a mistake. Most people don't know what a real mistake feels like. He knows.

In court, he had stood up and said he was sorry to the woman's family—the sister and the sister's husband—and he hoped someday they could forgive him. The baby that would be theirs now because its mother was dead was in the sister's arms. The sister patted it like she was comforting it for its loss. Or maybe just to keep it from crying in the courtroom.

The lawyer had gone over his statement with him, and when it was time he got up and he spoke it. The people, the sister and her husband, they'd looked at him as if what he said mattered. They'd looked at him as if he could offer them something. And standing there, with those people looking at him, he'd known it was the right thing for him to speak. He'd had the power in the car with the girl, and it extended somehow to a power he had over her family, who wanted to hear his voice, wanted to close the loop that connected him to the girl in her last moments. He had been there when she died and they hadn't, and he understood that he had that link to her, which they didn't have. I was there, he told himself, and out of his mouth came Sorry.

The future lasts a very long time, and where does his sorry fit into that? He's not sure. It's all done, her life, and his, too. He hates in a diffuse cloud, a haze of it. He feels it like sweat coming from the pores of his face and neck as he jogs, streaming down into his eyes, and from his pits and from his crotch, too, which sweats the most—it's a sweatbox down there. He tugs at his briefs to open things up and get some air.

He jogs not for health but so that he can defend himself. He jogs so as not to die on C Yard.

Things are clearer now. Pared down. Simple. He has to take orders and he doesn't like the orders, but they promise life. If you want to live, when you get the kite you do what it says. Kill, usually. He got one this morning.



*"So all these years you never did yoga but just walked around carrying the mat?"*

• •

It's not that easy to kill in prison. These guys on C Yard are exceptionally strong, and they refuse to go down. They get taken into medical and given new blood to replace what they lost and maybe a couple hundred stitches. A week later they're back on the yard, playing basketball or doing pushups, and you have trouble, real trouble. If you have an order to kill, you better be sure the job is done right, meaning fully and to the end, until the person's heart is not beating. This requires many rounds of stabbing with a handmade weapon, a file-sharpened door hinge, for instance, with melted-down CD cases molded around its base as a grip.

Another thing that makes stabbing someone on the yard difficult is you have to do it fast, before the staff and the guards come running to stop you. You have to do it fast, but it is slow work. The deeper the knife goes in, the better you are doing your job. But after each stab inward the thing has to be pulled out again, and with even more force than was needed to push it in. People don't realize that. Someone who has worked in a butcher shop would know. After every blow you have to pin the body to get your weapon back, while the muscle and tissue hold on to the knife. Try doing that a hundred times, two hundred times, and with

a homemade weapon, a tool that has to be used carefully because if your handle breaks you can't finish the job. Something else that surprised him was how dull it sounded when you stabbed someone with a shank, how dense and damp. *Thud. Thud. Thud.* Like trying to run through mud in a dream.

He knows how many times you have to stab a man in order to kill him, because everything happens on video and the I.S.U. counts: stabbed a hundred and sixty-eight times, stabbed two hundred and forty-one times. They make the prisoners involved watch the footage. They do this to set people up. The I.S.U. arranges hits this way. Because everyone can see right there in the video who helped and who didn't, and if you didn't help, if you stood by and didn't fight alongside your race, you're green-lighted.

He doesn't understand why it's green and not red, because green is go and red is stop, and when they green-light you your life is over.

He has learned the hard way to do what they tell him, and now he is good at the demanding labor of stabbing. He knows that you have to rest when you are stabbing to kill with a homemade shank. You stab, stab, stab, then rest. Stab, stab, stab, then rest. It's tiring, slow work, and the person being stabbed, at



first he resists, but after a while his body is somehow with you. It says, Keep going. Good work. You can do it. O.K., take a break. Almost there. Almost there. The body coaches you with its slowing breath and the way it lets you pin it down. It coöperates toward the goal. The person doesn't want to die, but his body has already made a deal with you. At least, that is how it feels, like he and the body are talking back and forth. Maybe it's a talent. One thing he is good at. Talking to a body while he takes the life out of it. The body dies. He goes to SHU.

Want to avoid carrying out a hit? Good luck. First, you have to debrief. To debrief, you have to care even less about yourself and about the world than you do in order to kill. Everyone despises you for it, especially the cops. Then you go to a prison for snitches. You can't ever be transferred out, after, or that's it for you. Still, it is the only option, but most people don't take it.

This order, he could get the chair for it. But he's heard they don't really use the chair; they just move you to a special wing at San Quentin. And word is that it's quiet on that tier, no trouble, and they have frozen burritos. The prisoners share food there. They pass those frozen burritos through the plumbing, from toilet to toilet on shared risers. So he's going to do the very best job he can. He thinks about frozen burritos while he sharpens the weapon he will use.

But then there is a lockdown and no one is allowed out on the yard. He's not

going to be able to carry out the order. He sits, tries to think, but he has never found thinking easy. You tell yourself to think and you're just going, *Think, think*, which is not thinking. He hears the jangle and sees Sergeant Haggart through his observation window. Haggart is his hit. And suddenly he's there, opening the cell.

He says to Haggart, What. He says this to cover the fact that he just put the shiv in his waistband. You make a sound and make it loud and it hides what you're doing somehow. It works. It makes him seem casual to say, What, when he's not casual.

You're coming out, Haggart says.

Everyone is on lockdown. Every single prisoner but him. Guys whacking their bats look at him from the window of their cells as he walks, Haggart behind him. He's close custody, but for some reason his hands are free. And they've got just one officer on him, not two. No one on the hall. Just him and Haggart, and he's not cuffed.

This is unscripted. This is never before.

And so he goes for it. He goes all the way for it. Turns around and lunges at Haggart. He's on him and just by pure luck hits the soft part of Haggart's neck with the weapon and it goes in so easily that he gasps. His gasp is almost as loud as Haggart's gasp, it is just—it is so soft there. The point is straight through Haggart's neck. Like in bullfighting. He's seen it on TV, those spears they put in the bull's neck to piss it off, make it angry

but weak. His weapon goes right into Haggart's neck and comes out easy, too. So he does it again, and again, and keeps going until the bull is down.

Haggart, he does resist. Even as the knife is in deep, he bucks up, and his arms jolt backward, but then, after a moment, he lets go, with a long sigh, a *you win*. You win.

He feels that the time for questions is past. That was on the border between outside life and inside life, after the girl with her river of hair, that whole junk-yard afternoon in the Valley, on Jupiter. No one asks him what his plan was for Haggart. They know his role. He's an animal that kills on command. They found the order green-lighting Haggart. The incident, as they call it, is on closed-circuit video. They don't seem to care much about him. This whole thing is a war between the I.S.U. and the shot callers. A game. There was money on it. Cops were betting, but not on a cop getting killed.

For a crime inside the prison they take you to the county courthouse. The people in that courthouse look at him like he's a caged monster, and he feels like one. He glowers at them or stares at the floor. His feet hurt because his shoes pinch. His eyes hurt, or it's really behind his eyes that hurts, like there's a cord behind each eye, tugging backward. He wants to get to death row, find some quiet. Be out of the game.

New lawyer meets with him before the trial. Peppers him with questions. Like about his intelligence quotient, as the lawyer keeps saying. *Kwo-shent*.

In his C-file, it says he's got extremely high intelligence, the lawyer tells him.

It's news to him.

A hundred and fifty-seven, the lawyer says. That means you're some kind of incredible genius. But you completed almost no schooling. Third grade is your tested level of reading and math comprehension. And the only employment history in your file is "recycler." You collected bottles and cans for a living.

Yes, sir, he tells the lawyer in a booming affirmative. He likes a question that's answerable. He pushed carts all night and took them to the recycling center on Glendale Boulevard when it opened. When he was working. When he was working, that was what he did.



The lawyer says that the reason they took him out of his cell during lockdown was on account of that number, 157. The watch commander had this idea that, since he was a level-four LWOP and validated gang member with such an unusually high I.Q., he was definitely a shot caller. The watch commander thought he could talk to a rival leader on D yard and head off a riot.

I ain't no shot caller, he tells the lawyer, the longest sentence he has spoken to this man.

At the trial, his lawyer blames the murder on the watch commander. Says the watch commander made a grave error, decided that this man, my client, who is mentally disturbed and has an I.Q. of 57, was some kind of calculating genius with an I.Q. of 157. Someone tries to object—it's one of the D.A.s. He says that intelligence is not tests but actions, and the defendant is obviously smart enough to make a weapon and murder a peace officer, and if that's not proof of cunning, well, then he—the lawyer is interrupting, Your Honor, let me finish—well then he, the D.A., doesn't know what cunning is. To murder a sergeant on a maximum-security cell block sure seems like it would take some cunning. But the judge allows the defense lawyer to speak. Lawyer shows the judge a paper, maybe the test results that prove he's not smart enough to get the electric chair. The judge asks, So how was it changed? And the lawyer says that someone in the clerk's office made a mistake. They thought 57 seemed too low, it looked like a typographical error, and so they fixed it by adding a one to the number, and made a new mistake.

So his I.Q. is 57? the judge asks, putting on eyeglasses to look more closely at the paper.

His original I.Q. test, Your Honor, you'll see here, says 57.

He does not get moved to death row after all.

They transfer him to Pelican Bay. All night in a cage, a metal-and-mesh box that you ride in alone when you're a problem, like he is now a problem. Beretta pointed at him the whole way. No piss stops. No water. Nothing. Eleven hours on a bus, alongside other cages,

and then the body count. Body receipts. The weapons bucket going up to the gun tower.

When the bus doors open into Receiving, he smells salt—the ocean, maybe.

Big bird flies over, and he strains his neck to see it out the bus window.

Pelican, the body in the cage across the aisle says. Grunts it, like he's spitting sunflower seeds. *Pel-ican*.

Body in the cage right next to him grumbles something. Sounds like Fuck that, or What that. He's not sure. The guy is wearing a spit hood, so his words are muffled. The new spit hoods are creepy. Black mesh you can see out of, if you're wearing it, but people can't look in.

Pelican Bay is where shot callers go. And cop killers. He didn't know they would have actual pelicans.

This body next to him in a spit hood: this is the last time he'll be so close to another human, to anyone, after he is processed in. In SHU, you see no one. Cops tag-team you, but from behind. You turn around for your restraints, hands and ankles. Then they follow. You look at no one who is looking at you. He's done SHU terms, and understands what is required to survive. But this term has no fixed end. He will be in there for decades.

They go one by one, and now it's his turn. The pelican, he sees as he steps off the bus, has landed on the corner of the roof of Receiving. Its beak is like something from a cartoon, like a big dipping ladle, and the way the two parts of it come together is like cartoon scissors.

He wants to wave. Say, Hey, bird. But his hands are cuffed to his waist and around it is a stun belt. If he jerks too quickly his own restraints will zap him.

The pelican takes flight.

He can hear the wings like two garbage bags being shaken open to line a can. *Fwap fwap. Fwap fwap fwap fwap*. The thing flies right over him, low, and perches above the door of Receiving. It's maybe twenty feet up. He feels a rush of excitement and makes a sound, not voluntary. He has stopped moving and is looking up to see it when a cop slams him in the head with a baton. Go! the cop yells at him. Move! The bird startles from the noise, but it doesn't stray far, just to a different corner of the building. Crazy thing looks like it

escaped from a cartoon on television.

Cop is about to Taser him, so he walks.

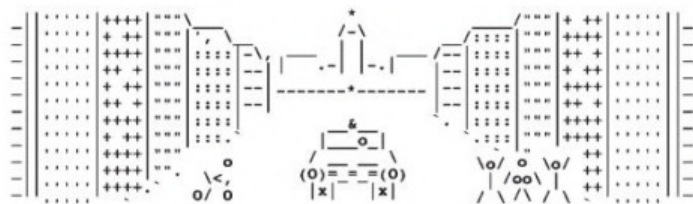
Everyone in Receiving is in cages. He is shoved into his with extra force. They hate him. He understands. He's the thing they have to transport and put in its concrete slot, feed through a flap, let loose on its dog run twice a week, though most prisoners don't use the dog run unless they want to throw piss through the fencing and gas somebody. Guy in the spit hood emits a strangled yell as two C.O.s in clear face shields bring him in. He gets cracked with a Taser stick and quiets down. Bodies in cages, groaning and restrained and counted, and still, he knows, still they will find a way to fight back. He'll do what he has to, and so will the bodies in the cages around him. They'll put him in SHU, and he'll get to work because the kite orders will arrive. And cops will set him up, which is what they do to cop killers. Set you up to get wiped out. You can make a knife out of anything. He's seen a guy do great damage with a knife made out of toilet paper. No lie. He's seen at least a dozen guys charge through a thick cloud from a dispersion grenade like it was nothing. The gas had a white powder in it that stuck to sweaty skin and burned it, and these guys were covered in the white stuff, like zombies, and just kept charging, chasing their hit. He met a guy who smuggled a sawed-off shotgun inside his anus. Watched another man climb the electric fence at Salinas Valley and somehow not get shocked, or maybe it was shocking him but he was unkillable by its voltage. Later they said he'd grounded himself or skipped the live wires; it was a mystery. The higher he climbed, the tighter he gripped. In the end, the shooter in the guard tower took him out. But if he and that shooter had had a contest and climbed up an electrified fence together, who do you think would have got farther? Which one of them? That's right. There is no contest. Prison turns its prisoners superhuman, and that is the truth. That is the truth. ♦

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Rachel Kushner on the world of California prisons.

# THE CRITICS



POP MUSIC

## REDEMPTION SONG

*Justin Bieber's reboot.*

BY CARRIE BATTAN

There is no greater opportunity for a pop star than repentance—the chance to rise again after a self-inflicted downfall. Much of Kanye West's genius, for instance, lies in his ability to withstand his own occasional demise and to orchestrate a subsequent triumph. For former child stars, the cycle comes with the territory: the standard foibles of young adulthood play out in public, creating an opportunity for a young singer or actor to emerge, mature and recovered, on the other side. In an era when many stars are incubated at Disney or Nickelodeon, this process has become almost a spectator sport.

Viewed this way, Justin Bieber's recent path of destruction has the potential to set him up for unprecedented success. Bieber achieved fame by putting a twist on pubescent infatuation, creating candy-sweet pop with a hip-hop swagger, and it's worth taking a brief tour of the trouble he's got into in the past couple of years, if only as a reminder of how far he's come. In 2013, he abandoned his pet monkey, Mally, in Germany. The same year, he was filmed urinating in a mop bucket and insulting Bill Clinton. At the Anne Frank House, in Amsterdam, he wrote in the guest book that he hoped Frank would have been a Belieber. In 2014, he egged a neighbor's house. His behavior was so volatile that when he was photographed spitting over a Toronto balcony the media assumed that he was aiming at a group of fans below. Bieber

pushed the limits of reasonable teen rebellion, rendering his reputation nearly unsalvageable.

His road to redemption began quietly, at the beginning of this year, with the release of "Where Are Ü Now," which appears on his new album, "Purpose." It's a soft-pedal dance track that warped a Bieber vocal sample into an instrumental, producing a mournful, dolphinlike trill. Infectious but melancholy, the single is a torch song for the dance floor. Produced by Skrillex and Diplo, it initially seemed like little more than a pleasant experiment. But its satisfying blend of qualities—a delicate dance beat, extraterrestrial vocal flourishes, measured exuberance and self-reflection—came to define much of Bieber's year. Along with "Where Are Ü Now," his singles "What Do You Mean?" and "Sorry" put him in an unexpected position, pumping out effortless sentimental Tropicália. These were songs sober enough to add depth to Bieber's persona yet sufficiently effervescent to be used in funny Vines.

But the rest of "Purpose," Bieber's fourth studio album—and his first since "Believe," in 2012—largely disposes with that lighthearted spirit to make way for a subdued and grave Bieber. He has either retreated so deeply into a state of contrition that he has lost his taste for fun or, more likely, become so fatigued by the process that he can't muster the energy required to have any. The syrupy declarations of puppy love

have been replaced by hushed tones and affection that never rises above a simmer. On "Company," he makes a romantic non-gesture that encapsulates his lukewarm desire for connection: "Maybe we can be each other's company." Often his restraint, delivered in the form of muted R.&B. and mid-tempo dance-pop, drifts toward lethargy.

"Purpose" is not subtle about Bieber's desire for rebirth. On many songs, a love interest acts as a stand-in for a public that has turned on him. "Is it too late now to say sorry?" he asks on "Sorry," which debuted at No. 2 on the *Billboard* charts. And on "I'll Show You" he makes a heavy-handed concession. "I gotta learn things, learn them the hard way," he sings. "Sometimes it's hard to do the right thing when the pressure's coming down like lightning." Around the time that Bieber was making "Purpose," he has said, he reconnected with his former pastor, and some songs have an air of youth-group wholesomeness, particularly "Life Is Worth Living": "Praying for a miracle/oooh show you grace," Bieber sings. At times, he turns his reflection outward, shifting from anguished to spiritually enlightened and then evangelical: "We're the inspiration—do you believe enough to die for it?"

As a vocalist, Bieber can jump from the choir to the dance club. He has a preternatural gift for melody, and, at twenty-one, he is still capable of reaching clear, high notes. He sounds his best at close range, which is unfortunately rare on "Purpose," the exception being a spare guitar song called "Love Yourself." With a few simple chord changes reminiscent of John Mayer, his newfound composure yields to vengeance. "Maybe you should know," he sings sweetly, as if gearing up to deliver a declaration of affection, "that my momma don't like you, and she likes everyone." On "Love Yourself," a brutal kiss-off disguised as a folk ditty, Bieber confronts a specific woman but also castigates the peers for whom selfies have thwarted self-reflection. "If you like the way you look that much, oh baby you should go and love yourself," he sings. He comes alive when he goes off script—he

ABOVE: JENNIFER DANIEL





*On many songs, a love interest acts as a stand-in for a public that has turned on him, demanding apologies and repentance.*

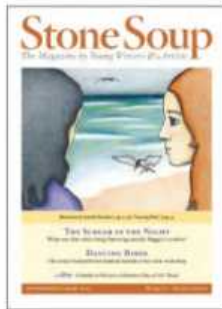
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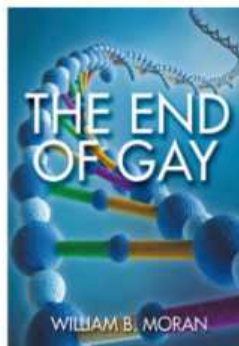
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is sharp, intimate, direct, withering, cruel, and bratty. Bieber's petulance, it turns out, is as compelling on a record as it is off-putting in real life. "Love Yourself" points to a well of emotion that "Purpose" mostly doesn't tap. The song prompts the listener to wonder what it would sound like if Bieber truly engaged with the ugly side of his downfall.

"Purpose" shows how timeworn conventions can fail musicians, causing them to release work that is awkward, bloated, and inert. The expectation that Bieber should apologize for his behavior, and tether that apology to an outmoded medium like an album, helped set him up for a degree of disappointment. Even as the Internet has fractured the consumption of music, albums persist as economic tent poles, particularly for stars who are still able to generate sales. An artist like Bieber, who balances online popularity with conventional prominence, must cater both to the ravenous appetites of the Internet and to the structural traditions of the industry. This year, he did a better job handling the former. He could have stopped his campaign with the colorful, meme-generating "Sorry" video and made a stronger statement than he has with "Purpose," which obstructs rather than defines his vision.

This is not to say that Bieber is incapable of making a coherent and meaningful record in this phase of his career. In late 2013, he released "Journals," a collection of songs shared online in a slow drip over a period of many weeks. Bieber dubbed "Journals," which is not quite an album, his "creative project." The songs crept online without much in the way of traditional promotion from Bieber's label, flying as far under the radar as is possible for an artist with a fan base passionate enough to overwhelm Instagram's servers. A neat package of buttery, lo-fi dollops, the project is an ideal platform for his strengths. Bieber plays a tormented but self-assured bad boy with complicated relationships, a dynamic R.&B. singer, a person willing to experiment. "Journals" shows what he could be without the weight of the world bearing down on him: an artist who needs no redemption. ♦



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A CRITIC AT LARGE

## FORBIDDEN LOVE

*The passions behind Patricia Highsmith's "The Price of Salt."*

BY MARGARET TALBOT



In December of 1948, Patricia Highsmith was a twenty-seven-year-old aspiring writer with a murderous imagination and an outsized talent for seducing women. Her first novel, "Strangers on a Train," was complete, but it would be more than a year before it was published. A Texas native with thick black hair and feral good looks, Highsmith made a habit of standing at attention when a woman walked into the room. That Christmas season, she was working behind the toy counter at Bloomingdale's, in Manhattan, in order to help pay for psychoanalysis. She wanted to explore the sharp ambivalence she felt about marrying her fiancé, a novelist named

Marc Brandel. Highsmith was a Barnard graduate, and, like many sophisticates at the time, she viewed homosexuality as a psychological defect that could be fixed; yet she had enough self-respect and sexual appetite to reject any attempt to fix her own. When her analyst suggested that she join a therapy group of "married women who are latent homosexuals," Highsmith wrote in her diary, "Perhaps I shall amuse myself by seducing a couple of them." She never married Brandel—or anyone else.

One day, a woman in a mink coat drifted into the toy department. Highsmith later recalled, "Perhaps I noticed her because she was alone, or because a

mink coat was a rarity, and because she was blondish and seemed to give off light." Like Alfred Hitchcock, Highsmith was captivated by frosty blondes, all the more so if they were married and rich. The shopper, who slapped her gloves into one hand as she scanned the merchandise, made Highsmith feel "odd and swimmy in the head, near to fainting yet at the same time uplifted." With an abstracted air, the woman, Mrs. E. R. Senn, bought a doll from Highsmith.

That night, Highsmith wrote an eight-page outline for a novel: a love story about Therese Belivet, a diffident nineteen-year-old who lives on her own in New York City, and Carol Aird, a wealthy suburban wife and mother in her thirties. Highsmith conjured what Therese would feel upon catching her first glimpse of Carol: "I see her the same instant she sees me, and instantly, I love her. Instantly, I am terrified, because I know she knows I am terrified and that I love her. Though there are seven girls between us, I know, she knows, she will come to me and have me wait on her."

Highsmith published the novel, "The Price of Salt," in 1952, under the pseudonym Claire Morgan. She was understandably wary of derailing her career, but she also may have been uncomfortable with the book's exaltation of love. Highsmith never wrote another book like it; indeed, her work became known for its ostentatious misanthropy. And for the next four decades she publicly dodged any connection to a book of which she had every right to be proud.

Highsmith was a pared-down, precise writer whose stories rarely strayed from the solipsistic minds of her protagonists—most of them killers (like the suave psychopath Tom Ripley) or would-be killers (like the unhappy husbands in several of her books). "The Price of Salt" is the only Highsmith novel in which no violent crime occurs.

Therese is not an eloquent or self-revealing character, and her dialogue with Carol is sometimes banal. Yet the novel is viscerally romantic. When Therese visits Carol's home for the first time, Carol offers her a glass of warm milk that tastes of "bone and blood, of warm flesh, saltless as chalk yet alive as a growing embryo." The two women embark on a road trip, and the descriptions of it read like

*A blonde in a mink coat made Highsmith feel "swimmy in the head, near to fainting."*



*"It's a Ken Burns documentary about Ken Burns documentaries."*

a noirish dream—stiff drinks, wood-pannelled motel rooms, a gun in a suitcase. A detective hired by Carol's husband pursues the couple, and you can feel Highsmith's thriller muscles twitching to life.

The love story is at once hijacked and heightened by the chase story. Therese's feelings, massing at the edge of her perception like the storm clouds out the car window, are a mystery to her. The weight of what goes unsaid as she and Carol talk about the towns they pass or where they might stop for breakfast builds in an almost ominous way. Like a girl in a fairy tale who has been put under a spell, Therese falls silent on the open road: "She did not want to talk. Yet she felt there were thousands of words choking her throat, and perhaps only distance, thousands of miles, could straighten them out."

When the women at last make love, Highsmith describes it with a sacramental intensity appropriate to the young Therese: "Her arms were tight around Carol, and she was conscious of Carol and nothing else, of Carol's hand that slid along her ribs, Carol's hair that brushed her bare breasts, and then her body too seemed to vanish in widening circles that leaped further and further, beyond where thought could follow." It makes for a stark contrast with the way Highsmith once described an attempt to have sex

with a man, which felt to her like "steel wool in the face, a sensation of being raped in the wrong place."

This month, "Carol," a film adaptation of "The Price of Salt," directed by Todd Haynes, opens in theatres. Haynes is known for his meditations on lush mid-century genres: women's pictures, Technicolor melodrama. Instead of treating such material as kitsch, he teases out emotions that were latent in the originals, showing what once could not be shown. Both "Carol" and "Far from Heaven"—his 2002 homage to the movies of Douglas Sirk—feel like fifties films that somehow eluded the Hays Code. Haynes's direction largely hews to the conventions of old Hollywood: in "Carol," there's a sex scene between the two women, played by Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara, but it's more swoony than libidinous. The characters don't use the word "lesbian"; the dialogue is mannered. Haynes's approach suits the novel, which is neither prim nor explicit about the women's affair.

Our image of the fifties still tends to be shaped by "Father Knows Best" clichés of contentedly conforming nuclear families. But the era offered some surprising freedoms. "The Price of Salt" depicts a world where a suburban matron

could take a salesgirl she's just met out for Old-Fashioneds in the middle of the day—and where two women in love might live together, hiding in plain sight as roommates, more easily than two gay men or an unmarried heterosexual couple might. In a recent interview with *Film Comment*, Haynes said that the "indecipherability" of lesbianism at the time—the "unimagined notions of what love between women might even look like"—is the engine of Highsmith's plot.

Though homosexuality was invisible to most Americans at the time, it was increasingly discussed among intellectuals, many of whom were in the thrall of psychoanalysis. The question most often asked about same-sex attraction was still whether it could be overcome, but people were finally beginning to acknowledge the range of possible sexual identities and behaviors. By 1953, the Kinsey Reports, on male and female sexuality, had been published, broadening the discussion even further.

In 1955, Ann Aldrich, the pseudonymous author of the best-seller "We Walk Alone," an informal ethnography of lesbian life, observed, "If homosexuality itself is not on the increase, mention of it among people today is far more prevalent than ever before." Aldrich attributed this higher profile to a "climate of concern with all things psychological." In her view, "intelligent people are preaching tolerance of inversion"—as homosexuality was sometimes called—even if they "are not regarding the invert as a healthy person." Aldrich, who was gay, suggested that lesbianism was usually a case of arrested sexual development and an artifact of penis envy or a domineering mother. Psychoanalysts, Aldrich believed, could address the condition, though she acknowledged that "the 'incurable' lesbian as I have known her is not usually the tragic heroine of a lesbian novel who lives in abject misery, nor is she the psychotic case material in some psychiatrists' files." She added, "While I hesitate to say that she is a thoroughly happy person, at the same time I cannot in all honesty judge her to be an unhappy person." Despite its carefully couched ambivalence, "We Walk Alone" brought its author hundreds of letters from American women who felt emboldened to ask her where lesbians could find jobs, bars, and other lesbians.



Many of Aldrich's readers also bought cheap new paperback novels with titles like "Odd Girl Out," "Dormitory Women," and "I Prefer Girls." If these books were partly created for the delectation of men—the cover art often featured smoldering babes in lingerie—they at least made it clear that lesbians existed. Such novels were often written by gay women, who tried to allow their heroines some honest enjoyment within the confines of the genre, which required its busty Sapphists to find real love with a man, go mad, or commit suicide. As Ann Bannon, a former pulp author, notes in her foreword to the 1999 book "Strange Sisters: The Art of Lesbian Pulp Fiction 1949-1969," she and other writers spoke, in part, "to an audience of women who were starved for connections with others, who thought they were uniquely alone with emotions they couldn't explain."

Again and again in Highsmith's fiction, one character develops a deadly obsession with another. In "The Talented Mr. Ripley" (1955), Tom Ripley both desires and resents Dickie Greenleaf, a wealthy scapegrace who is gallivanting around Italy. Ripley bludgeons Dickie to death and—in the ultimate act of erotic ownership—assumes his identity. In "Strangers on a Train" (1950), the oleaginous Charles Anthony Bruno proposes a murder pact to someone he's just met, then acts on it by killing the man's adulterous wife, placing the two men in a queasy bond. Walter Stackhouse, the suburban husband at the center of "The Blunderer" (1954), contemplates killing his wife, then gets inescapably entangled with a man who has committed such a crime. The moral compass in Highsmith's thrillers is always jittery, and passion repeatedly leads people to violence. Joan Schenkar, the author of the artful biography "The Talented Miss Highsmith" (2009), writes, "Pat thought about love the way she thought about murder: as an emotional urgency between two people, one of whom dies in the act."

There's nothing like reading the Freudians of the nineteen-fifties to make one wary of glib psychological claims, but it's not a stretch to say that Highsmith had a terrible mother. Mary Coates Highsmith, a narcissistic beauty and a moderately successful illustrator, taunted and competed with Patricia, her only

child. Highsmith loved and hated her mother as a result, and, when Mary divorced her husband and remarried, Patricia resented her stepfather for coming between them. At twenty, Highsmith wrote in her diary, "Could I possibly be in love with my own mother? Perhaps in some incredible way I am." According to two biographies of Highsmith, her mother liked to tell people that she'd tried to abort Patricia by drinking turpentine. Once, while visiting Patricia in Paris, Mary Highsmith pretended to be her daughter and gave an interview to journalists. She called it a joke, but Highsmith, in a letter to a cousin, wrote, "I think a psychiatrist would put another meaning to it."

Schenkar characterizes Highsmith's relationship with her mother as a folie à deux: "They could not bear each other's company, and they could not leave each other alone." Surely that relationship contributed to Highsmith's habit of seducing and philandering, to the conflation of obsessive love and homicidal ideation in so many of her characters, and to a particular strain of perversity in "The Price of Salt." Carol tucks Therese into bed while giving her that warm, embryonic milk, and the gesture feels bizarrely maternal. (The scene, one of the novel's best, has an almost witchy feel. Therese downs her drink with fatalistic obedience, and it affects her like a truth potion: her voice rises "suddenly in a babble" as she tells Carol about her secret loneliness.)

The day after Highsmith finished the manuscript of "The Price of Salt," she decided to track down Mrs. Senn. She had memorized her address—315 Murray Avenue, Ridgewood, New Jersey—from the sales receipt. She took the Erie Railroad from Penn Station; before boarding a bus to Murray Avenue, she drank two ryes to get her courage up. In Senn's residential neighborhood, Highsmith felt conspicuous, but, as she wrote in her diary, she lingered until she saw "a pale aqua automobile . . . driven by a woman with dark glasses and short blond hair, alone, and I think in a pale blue or aqua dress with short sleeves." Maybe it was her quarry; maybe not.

If Mrs. Senn established the template for Carol Aird, Highsmith's passionate affair with a woman named Virginia Kent Catherwood allowed her to fill in the lines. Catherwood was a sexual outlaw

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with a Main Line pedigree: she had been a Philadelphia debutante. By the time she took up with Highsmith, she was a wealthy divorcée who bore a resemblance to Katharine Hepburn (and, evidently, to Mrs. Senn). Virginia, the daughter of Arthur Atwater Kent, an inventor and the founder of a radio company, had married a banker named Cummins Catherwood, in a wedding that made the society pages. She met Highsmith at a party in New York, and in 1946 they became lovers. They were together for only a year—Highsmith's affairs rarely lasted much longer than that—but Catherwood remained an ideal. In her diary, Highsmith rhapsodized, "My green and red goddess, my jade and garnet, my moss and hollyberry, my sea and sun, my marrow and my blood, my stop and go baby, I adore you, I worship you, I kiss you, I cherish you, I defend you, I defy you ever not to love me, I caress your nipples with my tongue."

Highsmith and Catherwood never spoke again after the relationship ended, but Highsmith invoked her frequently in her writing, most notably in the posh, lightly sardonic Carol. Highsmith also stole a critical plot detail from Catherwood's life for "The Price of Salt."

Catherwood's husband had hired a detective who recorded his wife and a female lover in a hotel room; the tapes were played in court, and Catherwood, who had a daughter, lost custody. Carol, too, has a child who becomes the object of a custody struggle. Children rarely appear in Highsmith's fiction, however, and in "The Price of Salt" Carol's daughter, Rindy, remains an offstage presence. (The movie, which offers a warmer version of Carol, shows her interacting sweetly with her daughter.) Highsmith can't seem to fully imagine a mother's longing for her child, but since she's writing from the perspective of Therese—who can't quite empathize with motherhood, either—something touching comes through. Therese sees Carol's melancholy as a mysterious veil that separates them, but readers can sense that it is a simpler, more devastating sorrow. Highsmith writes, "Therese watched Carol's face as she looked at the picture of the little girl with the white-blond hair and the serious face, with the taped white bandage on her knee. 'It's not a very good picture,' Carol said, but her face had changed, grown softer." It is one of the few poignant passages in Highsmith's body of work.

In May, 1952, Coward-McCann published "The Price of Salt." Harper & Bros.,

which had released "Strangers on a Train" two years earlier, turned it down, perhaps because it wasn't another thriller. Highsmith said later that the novel's title was a Biblical reference; Schenkar, her biographer, traces it to a fragment of Gospel text in André Gide's "The Counterfeiters": "If the salt have lost its flavor where-with shall it be salted?—That is the tragedy with which I am concerned." Highsmith was greatly relieved when her agent suggested that she could use a pseudonym. She was not ashamed of her sexuality, but she did not want to be known as a lesbian author. The novel was respectfully reviewed, though a critic at the *Times* seemed puzzled by its "low voltage" eroticism—possibly because it was more literary than most lesbian pulp. "The Price of Salt" sold exceptionally well—more than a million copies, after it came out as a twenty-five-cent Bantam paperback.

In "Beautiful Shadow," a 2003 biography of Highsmith, the British journalist Andrew Wilson uncovered new details about Senn, whose first name was Kathleen. The self-possessed, athletic, charming wife of a wealthy businessman, she was also an alcoholic who had been in and out of psychiatric institutions. In 1951, unbeknownst to Highsmith, Senn killed herself in the garage of her Ridge-wood home.

The other inspiration for Carol Aird, Virginia Kent Catherwood, made news in 1959, when a playboy named David Mdivani filed a million-dollar lawsuit against her, alleging that she had alienated the affections of his wife, Virginia Sinclair. One newspaper ran the headline "WOMAN TOOK HIS WIFE FROM HIM," though it can safely be presumed that few readers understood the full import of this sentence. The media skirted the matter of homosexuality by stating that Catherwood had lured Sinclair away by giving her expensive gifts. (Sinclair was also an heiress.) At one point, a gossip column in the *Los Angeles Times* described Sinclair and Catherwood arriving together in the lobby of the Beverly Hills Hotel after a ski trip to Sun Valley. The reporter, noting that both women had a "deep ecru" tan, proclaimed, "Very striking—these two blondes!" Mdivani eventually dropped the lawsuit. Catherwood, an alcoholic, died in 1966, at the age of fifty-one.

After "The Price of Salt," Highsmith published twenty more novels, many of



*"I keep this room empty to incite envy."*



which became movies, and nine short-story collections. She won several literary prizes and was heralded in France. Generally caustic, she made crude remarks about Jews and African-Americans. She continued to bed women and to worship some of them, but she described women in general—and feminists in particular—as “whining.” Her vitriol took eccentric forms: according to Wilson, she once declared that she was repelled by the idea of women reading in libraries while they were menstruating. She loved snails, which she kept by the hundred as pets and took to parties in a handbag, where they clung to a head of lettuce.

“The Price of Salt” was a unique expression of candor in a career built on artifice.

In 1949, Highsmith, while working on the novel, wrote in her diary that she was “grateful” not to have to spoil “my best thematic material by transposing it” to a “false male-female relationship.” She tried a few times to write what she called a second “girls’ book,” but abandoned the effort. Perhaps it’s just as well: one of the plots she sketched out, “The Inhuman Ones,” was to be about “the types of female homosexuals who have something missing from their hearts, who really hate their own sex.” For decades, Highsmith denied rumors that she had written “The Price of Salt”; Schenkar reports that Highsmith called the novel a “stinking” book.

In 1990, Highsmith agreed to a new edition, without a pseudonym, and wrote an afterword in which she seemed shyly pleased with the novel’s devoted readership. But it was a youthful book, and a hopeful one, and she was now a sour and rancorous older woman. She spent her final years in a fortress-like house in Switzerland, and died in a hospital in Locarno in 1995, at the age of seventy-four. The last acquaintance to see her was her accountant.

One evening in 1959, a thirty-two-year-old writer named Marijane Meaker was having a drink at L’s, a lesbian bar in Greenwich Village. Meaker wrote lesbian pulp novels for the Gold Medal imprint; her first was “Spring Fire,” published in 1952, under the pseudonym Vin Packer. She had learned—because her editor had insisted on it—to make

sure that these stories didn’t end well for their heroines. At the time, paperbacks were often sent to readers through the mail, making them subject to censorship by the postal authorities. Although the novels could depict “perverse” sexuality, they could not be seen to endorse it: those who indulged had to return to the straight and narrow or be punished. (At the conclusion of “Spring Fire,” about two lovers in a sorority house, one of the young women rediscovers her true heterosexuality and moves into a dorm; the other has a car accident and a nervous breakdown.) Meaker was a woman of multiple pseudonyms. She was also Ann Aldrich, the author of “We Walk Alone.”

At the bar, Meaker began talking to an attractive dark-haired woman in a trenchcoat who was drinking gin and smoking Gauloises. It was Highsmith, and to Meaker, who was six years younger, she “looked like a combination of Prince Valiant and Rudolf Nureyev.” By then, Highsmith was a celebrated author—she had won the Grand Prix de la Littérature Policière—and Meaker idolized her. She and the other customers at L’s knew that Highsmith had written “The Price of Salt,” and they loved it for one reason in particular. As Meaker notes, “It was for many years the only lesbian novel, in either hard or soft cover, with a happy ending.”

In the final pages of “The Price of Salt,” Carol has lost custody of her daughter, but nobody has died or been institutionalized. By modern standards, the book’s ending has the pat feel of a Sirk picture, abruptly reuniting lovers for whom the obstacles are enormous. Will Carol really get over relinquishing her daughter? Can the two women truly be left alone to make a life together? Highsmith almost circumvents those doubts; the novel’s last scene has the pull of a torch song. Therese finds Carol in a restaurant, where she’s dining with friends: “It was like meeting Carol all over again, but it was still Carol and no one else. It would be Carol, in a thousand cities, a thousand houses, in foreign lands where they would go together, in heaven and in hell.” Leave it to Highsmith to get hell in there, too. ♦



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## UP FROM THE HOLD

*The story of tap.*

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Tap, which is the dance form of jazz music, has been around more or less since the late nineteenth century, but, unlike jazz, which has been the subject of many deep-browed books, it has a small, mediocre literature. There have been some valuable works—biographies and memoirs, collections of interviews, even a few histories—but never a volume that did the real heavy lifting: critical, analytical, historical, comprehensive.

orchestra, the most important sound at any tap concert is the one being made by the dancer's feet. And that sensory doubleness, sight combined with sound, makes for a psychological-aesthetic doubleness. We get an abstract art, music, wedded to a narrative art, the story that is inescapably there whenever a human body places itself before us.

Then, there is tap's history, the fact that it was created by extremely poor

manded to dance, they did routines that, maybe just a month or two earlier, had been part of the observance of their religion, or the celebration of a feast day, or an expression of their relationship to their grandparents. Now the purpose of the dance was simply to put them through their paces, as if they were dogs or horses. They must have wanted, in some measure, to impress their captors, in order to be better treated. They must also have been ashamed of that wish, and wondered why they didn't throw themselves overboard. Anyone who hears this story will feel the burden of grief and humiliation that was built into tap at its birth.

Honi Coles, the distinguished "class act" tapper, once said that when Bill (Bojangles) Robinson was making movies in the nineteen-thirties with



*At tap's high tide, the nineteen-twenties through the fifties, tap was everywhere: in movies, in the theatre, and above all in clubs.*

It's not hard to see why. Dance itself, because it mostly went unrecorded, was little studied in a serious way, and there was no reason that tap should have been an exception. Indeed, there are many reasons that it should have been the worst served. First, it is a peculiar form, in that it is both movement and music. Most other kinds of dance can be described as being performed *to* the music, but tap, like other foot-stamping forms—flamenco, Irish step dancing, most Indian classical dance—also makes its own music. Even if there's a pianist onstage, or a whole

people, Irish and West African, in a place that they came to not because they wanted to be there—that is, here—but because in their own lands either they were starving or they had been captured and converted into salable property. I know of no account of the origins of tap that does not include the story that, during the voyage from Africa, slaves were periodically brought up from the ship's hold and forced to dance on the deck. They were worth money now, and the physical exercise helped keep them from dying. Imagine what this meant. Com-

Shirley Temple—films in which, some people later claimed, this great star was pushed into Uncle Tomism—he was the happiest man in the world. "Part of it was the generosity that black entertainers showed to whites," Coles said. "We were so happy somebody wanted what we did, we were ready just to give it away."

Today's black choreographers are not so ready. In New York, Donald Byrd, a prominent African-American choreographer, recently presented a piece, "The Minstrel Show Revisited," that links nineteenth-century minstrelsy—which



was a breeding ground of tap and also the ancestor of some of black America's most brilliant comedy (Richard Pryor, Dave Chappelle)—with the killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown.

**T**his tangle of emotions—who wants to take it on? And who wants to anger as many people as any book on tap will do, no matter what it says? (Some people still don't want to hear that Irish step dancing contributed to tap, which it unquestionably did.) But forget the politics. What about the technical matters—the question of when a dancer will drop his heel, and how much he's working from the side of the foot rather than from the middle? That's not to speak of the range of musical choices. Really, in order to write a book on this subject, a person would almost have to be not just a dance critic but a tap dancer.

That book has now been published—"What the Eye Hears: A History of Tap Dancing" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). The author, Brian Seibert, is a dance critic for the *Times*. (He also contributes to *Goings On About Town*, in *The New Yorker*.) He is a tap dancer; he never went pro, but he has studied for most of his life. The book took him more than ten years to write.

One problem that he had to contend with was the unvarnished racism of much of the historical material. Because he is white, he might have spent the whole book shaking a compensatory fist or—more likely—walking on eggshells. He doesn't. Now and then, he utters a cry of indignation. There are also certain injustices—no greater, I would say, than other injustices—that seem to be recorded, however quietly, on every page. (Again and again, Seibert notes the instances in which routines created by black dancers were credited to other people. He can't get over it. He himself is an artist—he writes beautiful prose and is a crackerjack storyteller—and he can't stand to see artists go unacknowledged.) But, in general, he states the facts dispassionately: the Vegas casinos where the tappers who performed there couldn't get a room or eat, the critics complaining if a dancer seemed to them to show an insufficiently "Negro" spirit, the art-

ists' complicity, performing as the Three Little Dots or Two Real Coons. Seibert doesn't tell us to get mad about these things. He lets us get mad by ourselves.

**I**t's hard to know which of Seibert's dance portraits to spotlight, because there are so many wonderful ones. Should it be John Bubbles (1902-86), who Seibert and a lot of other commentators think was one of the greatest tap dancers on record? (George Gershwin chose him to create the role of Sportin' Life, in "Porgy and Bess.") It is an unlooked-for gift that "What the Eye Hears" was published in the age of YouTube, which offers thrilling footage of many of the early-twentieth-century performers, including Bubbles. (See the video labelled "Buck and Bubbles . . . Varsity Show.") As Seibert points out, we don't have to take his word for it. Or should one focus on Jimmy Slyde (1927-2008), the bebop master whom Seibert saw while he was still in his prime, and whom he clearly adored? Whoever the dancer, the book's emphasis is on technical achievement and musical invention—that is, on art. Many people, including dance critics, have often thought of tap as something that people with a certain skill just got up there and did, in order to have, and give us, a good time. Seibert digs down into the particulars. Slyde, he says, used his shoulders the way other people use their eyebrows. Bubbles used the thump of the foot to "emphasize offbeat accents and to ground his more complex syncopations afforded by the tempo."

Seibert also brings in the matter of personality—charisma and charm, which are crucial matters in tap—and he has some fun with people who were short on it. (Of Eleanor Powell: "Like many performers of her time, Powell habitually affected a pose of ecstatic pleasure, head back and mouth open. In some close-ups, she looks ready to eat the camera.") He does not give a lot of biographical information, and, alas, he runs shy of scandal, but some improprieties sneak in, by way of explaining artistic matters. Baby Laurence (1921-74), whom the old tappers viewed as a master, was not recorded on film during his superb middle years,

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*"He's right behind me, isn't he?"*

because his heroin addiction was such that he could never get it together to be in a show. His best performances, Seibert says, were given on the sidewalk, "cutting" (doing a challenge dance) with his colleague Groundhog, in front of Minton's Playhouse, the famous club in Harlem. "The dealers liked to watch them," their friend Miles Davis said. "They gave them shit for free if they got down."

Seibert does not disrespect Baby Laurence for this. Indeed, he sees something good in just about every dancer he writes about. I am talking here not about charity, merely judiciousness. He has a few adjustments to make to great reputations, for example, that of Fred Astaire, who is so often described as perfect. He doesn't love Gene Kelly—"In the age of swing, he seldom swung"—though he calls Kelly's "Singin' in the Rain" number imperishable ("that wet face, stretching into rain as if to bask in sun"). At the same time, he considers Donald O'Connor "the age's most underrated dancer." One performer showed this little grace; another took a step just a certain way. If Seibert betrays any identifiable bias, it's toward

women. That's O.K. by me. Many male tappers, black and white, have taken female tappers less than seriously.

One job Seibert gave himself was to trace a clear historical arc, and he does that. Through the meeting of Irish and West African people trying to enjoy themselves on a Saturday night—often together, in the same dance halls—the thing we call tap dance emerged, with its special technique and, as it grew alongside jazz, its special rhythmic qualities. At its high tide, the nineteen-twenties through the fifties, tap was everywhere: in movies, in musicals, in vaudeville, and above all in clubs. Then something happened. People in the field speak of an actual moment when the change occurred: the death of Bill Robinson. On the day of Robinson's funeral, in 1949, the schools in Harlem closed at noon. Three thousand people crowded into the Abyssinian Baptist Church, and thousands more stood outside. Mayor William O'Dwyer gave the eulogy. After that, as the speed tapper Buster Brown (1913–2002) put it, "Bang. No more jobs."

Of course, the economic drain was not because of Robinson. He was seventy-two; he had a right to die. But many factors converged. In Broadway shows, the fashion changed from tap acts to "dream ballets." (Seibert says that Agnes de Mille, the leading popularizer of the dream ballet, was sometimes spoken of in the community as "the Woman Who Killed Tap.") As for television, jobs were few, and usually ill-paid. Seibert writes that Honi Coles's partner, Cholly Atkins, "remembered that the top fee for an act like Coles and Atkins was a hundred-fifty dollars an episode—which, after the agent's cut, bought some groceries." But Broadway and television were small matters compared with the closing of the night clubs. People didn't go to clubs anymore—they stayed home and watched TV. Popular music changed, too, from tap-friendly jazz to rock and roll. Atkins took a job choreographing routines for Motown groups. He taught the Supremes, and Martha and the Vandellas, how to move. Other men got work as janitors or hotel clerks, or they drank.

Then, in the seventies, a number of white female tappers—the most important were Brenda Bufalino and Jane Goldberg—decided that tap had to be saved. They pulled these discouraged men out of their living rooms and organized festivals where tap could once again be performed and taught. Seibert can be very funny about how the women ran around getting the old tappers their meds and drove them to their appointments, and how, at the teaching sessions, the woman often got the job of explaining how a step should be done, at which point the great man, from his chair, might correct her, in front of the class.

Those women should be honored, but what tap needed, in addition to classes and festivals, was a big star. Soon he came: Gregory Hines (1946–2003), the son of a jazz drummer and, with his brother Maurice, part of a child tap act. For a time, Hines wanted to be a rock guitarist, and a hippie, but finally he was willing to be a tap dancer, and, with his affability and his virility and his tank tops, everyone fell in love with him. He starred in big-time musicals—"Eubie!" (1979), "Sophisticated



Ladies" (1981), "Jelly's Last Jam" (1992), getting Tony Award nominations for all three—and in movies, including "The Cotton Club" (1984), "White Nights" (1985), and "Tap" (1989). In "White Nights," he did an extended competition dance with Mikhail Baryshnikov, choreographed by Twyla Tharp. It was "difficult to choose which one to watch, which shade of cool to savor," Seibert writes. "For Hines to hold his own against the man justly considered the greatest dancer in the world—that said something about Hines. For a tap dancer, and a black one, to be framed as an equal to ballet's prince—that said something about tap, and where Hines might take it." But Hines died young, at fifty-seven, of liver cancer.

The mantle passed to Hines's foremost protégé, Savion Glover, and one of the most interesting things in "What the Eye Hears" is to watch Seibert try to sort out his feelings about Glover's influence on today's tap. Glover, now forty-one, is certainly the most accomplished tap technician living—probably the most accomplished who ever lived. (Hines never reached Glover's level.) Seibert credits him for that, but then wonders whether such extreme concentration on technique is good for the field, or even for the art. Glover has drilled deeper and deeper into sound, but tap is other things besides sound. It is charm and suavity and wit. Indeed, it is silence as well as sound. (Bill Robinson used long, long pauses.) Glover tends to see himself and a few others, legates of certain approved elders, as "the Last HooFeRz standing," with the right to dictate how tap should be done.

This goes directly against Seibert's primary emphasis, which is inclusiveness, a welcoming attitude, a love of things mixing up together. He must be the world's most enthusiastic multiculturalist. Syncopation, he says, was a creed that Irving Berlin, "as a Jewish immigrant whose family had fled Russian pogroms, . . . had learned from a Negro ragtime pianist in New York's Chinatown at a dive called Nigger Mike's. (Mike was also a Russian Jew.)" It's not just cultures that Seibert likes to see mix. Leonard Reed, a light-

skinned tapper, and later an important producer—he claimed to have invented the Shim Sham, a simple heel-toe combination that became a sort of anthem of tap—was born in a tepee in Oklahoma. Seibert writes, "His mother was Choctaw Cherokee, and her great-grandfather was black. As for his father, Reed said that he was 'white and Irish or something.'" That, to Seibert, is the way tap is, and should be.

If this attitude is one of the book's beauties, it is also the source of what I think is its one serious fault, which is that it includes too much. (It is more than five hundred pages long.) The small tap groups of the seventies and eighties are not compelling enough to merit the space that Seibert gives them. The same goes for his coverage of tap outside the United States. The tap dancers of Estonia: I wish them well, but until they do something of note I don't need to read about them. Nevertheless, since there is so little prior literature, you can understand Seibert's wish to be thorough. Also—a common problem with heavily researched books—he found out things he couldn't bear not to use. (Tap hasn't caught on in Africa! Hitler loved Fred Astaire!)

But, if some modern tappers are not fascinating to read about, others are—for example, the virtuoso Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, now thirty-seven years old. In the late nineteen-nineties, Savion Glover, unaccustomed at that point to choreographing for women, put her in his show "Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk," though he had her dressed as a boy. Another person of interest is Michelle Dorrance, thirty-six years old, whose mother was a ballet dancer and whose father is the coach of the University of North Carolina's women's soccer team. Dorrance is ambitious. She's had her own company for four years, and she creates ensemble choreography, not a specialty of tap soloists. Seibert feels that she has also extended the art psychologically. Tap has long been said to have a narrow subjective field: wit, joy, slyness. Dorrance's choreography, Seibert writes, widens the territory, laying bare "emotions hidden in the mechanics of tap technique, revealing how swiveling ankles reveal tender parts." This year, she

won a MacArthur Fellowship. If tap is to survive, these people need to be written about.

Tap is in a strange place: very often, when it is used, it is not just an artistic medium, a language, but also—automatically, almost—a subject. It refers to itself, as a focus of nostalgia or historical meditation or something else. This has been true of almost all tap movies since the eighties, and of the most popular tap musicals, such as "42nd Street" (1980) and "Bring in 'da Noise." Another example is coming to Broadway in April: "Shuffle Along, Or, the Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed," which is a reprise of a fabled all-black revue. Created by the same men who made "Bring in 'da Noise," Glover and George C. Wolfe, it will, like that production, tell us about tap as well as show it. This is a road that tap cannot go down forever. It makes the art too inverted, too limited, and it offers too few jobs. For tap to move forward, there has to be some replacement for the clubs of the old days, and I don't know where that will come from. I guess the form could be kept alive by grants and private patronage, like ballet and modern dance, but it is not as popular as ballet, or even modern dance.

It could die. Other genres that were once central to Western art have dropped off the shelf—epic poetry, *commedia dell'arte*, verse drama, the masque—and, if this list were expanded to include Asia, it would be much longer. Japan's venerable puppetry traditions—Bunraku, Awaji—exist only because they are funded by the government. The classic dance forms of India, from what I am told by some of their more conservative practitioners, have almost no audience outside the festivals. The same could happen to tap. In that case, it will go down in the history books as a marvelous thing that grew and died under certain historical conditions, mostly in the twentieth century. And Seibert's book will serve as a noble testimonial. ♦

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HOW'S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT  
*From the Boston Globe Magazine.*

I should have been angry—or embarrassed myself—but instead I was oddly flattered. His memory of me was of a wonton seductress who owned her sexuality, a far cry from the shy 19-year-old I had really been.

## SPOOKED

*What do we learn about science from a controversy in physics?*

BY ADAM GOPNIK



What makes science science? The pious answers are: its ceaseless curiosity in the face of mystery, its keen edge of experimental objectivity, its endless accumulation of new data, and the cool machines it uses. We stare, the scientists see; we gawk, they gaze. We guess; they know.

But there are revisionist scholars who question the role of scientists as magi. Think how much we take on faith, even with those wonders of science that seem open to the non-specialist's eye. The proliferation of hominids—all those near-men and proto-men and half-apes found in the fossil record, exactly as Darwin predicted—rests on the interpretation of a few blackened Serengeti mandibles that it would take a lifetime's training to really evaluate. (And those who have put in the time end up squabbling anyway.)

Worse, small hints of what seems like scamming reach even us believers. Every few weeks or so, in the *Science Times*, we find out that some basic ques-

tion of the universe has now been answered—but why, we wonder, weren't we told about the puzzle until after it was solved? Results announced as certain turn out to be hard to replicate. Triumphs look retrospectively engineered. This has led revisionist historians and philosophers to suggest that science *is* a kind of scam—a socially agreed-on fiction no more empirically grounded than any other socially agreed-on fiction, a faith like any other (as the defenders of faiths like any other like to say). Back when, people looked at old teeth and broken bones with the eye of faith and called them relics; we look at them with the eye of another faith and call them proof. What's different?

The defense of science against this claim turns out to be complicated, for the simple reason that, as a social activity, science is vulnerable to all the comedy inherent in any social activity: group thinking, self-pleasing, and running down the competition in order to get the customer's (or, in this case, the gov-

ernment's) cash. Books about the history of science should therefore be about both science and scientists, about the things they found and the way they found them. A good science writer has to show us the fallible men and women who made the theory, and then show us why, after the human foibles are boiled off, the theory remains reliable.

No well-tested scientific concept is more astonishing than the one that gives its name to a new book by the *Scientific American* contributing editor George Musser, "Spooky Action at a Distance" (Scientific American/Farrar, Straus & Giroux). The ostensible subject is the mechanics of quantum entanglement; the actual subject is the entanglement of its observers. Musser presents the hard-to-grasp physics of "non-locality," and his question isn't so much how this weird thing can be true as why, given that this weird thing had been known about for so long, so many scientists were so reluctant to confront it. What keeps a scientific truth from spreading?

The story dates to the early decades of quantum theory, in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, when Albert Einstein was holding out against the "probabilistic" views about the identity of particles and waves held by a younger generation of theoretical physicists. He created what he thought of as a *reductio ad absurdum*. Suppose, he said, that particles like photons and electrons really do act like waves, as the new interpretations insisted, and that, as they also insisted, their properties can be determined only as they are being measured. Then, he pointed out, something else would have to be true: particles that were part of a single wave function would be permanently "entangled," no matter how far from each other they migrated. If you have a box full of photons governed by one wave function, and one escapes, the escapee remains entangled in the fate of the particles it left behind—like the outer edges of the ripples spreading from a pebble thrown into a pond. An entangled particle, measured here in the Milky Way, would have to show the same spin—or the opposite spin, depending—or momentum as its partner, conjoined millions of light-years away, when measured at the same time. Like Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, no



matter how far they spread apart they would still be helplessly conjoined. Einstein's point was that such a phenomenon could only mean that the particles were somehow communicating with each other instantaneously, at a speed faster than light, violating the laws of nature. This was what he condemned as "spooky action at a distance."

John Donne, thou shouldst be living at this hour! One can only imagine what the science-loving Metaphysical poet would have made of a metaphor that had two lovers spinning in unison no matter how far apart they were. But Musser has a nice, if less exalted, analogy for the event: it is as if two magic coins, flipped at different corners of the cosmos, always came up heads or tails together. (The spooky action takes place only in the context of simultaneous measurement. The particles share states, but they don't send signals.)

What started out as a *reductio ad absurdum* became proof that the cosmos is in certain ways absurd. What began as a bug became a feature and is now a fact. Musser takes us into the lab of the Colgate professor Enrique Galvez, who has constructed a simple apparatus that allows him to entangle photons and then show that "the photons are behaving like a pair of magic coins.... They are not in contact, and no known force links them, yet they act as one." With near-quantum serendipity, the publication of Musser's book has coincided with news of another breakthrough experiment, in which scientists at Delft University measured two hundred and forty-five pairs of entangled electrons and confirmed the phenomenon with greater rigor than before. The certainty that spooky action at a distance takes place, Musser says, challenges the very notion of "locality," our intuitive sense that some stuff happens only here, and some stuff over there. What's happening isn't really spooky action at a distance; it's spooky distance, revealed through an action.

Why, then, did Einstein's question get excluded for so long from reputable theoretical physics? The reasons, unfolding through generations of physicists, have several notable social aspects, worthy of Trollope's studies of how private feuds affect public decisions. Musser tells us that fashion, temperament, zeit-

geist, and sheer tenacity affected the debate, along with evidence and argument. The "indeterminacy" of the atom was, for younger European physicists, "a lesson of modernity, an antidote to a misplaced Enlightenment trust in reason, which German intellectuals in the 1920's widely held responsible for their country's defeat in the First World War." The tonal and temperamental difference between the scientists was as great as the evidence they called on.

Musser tracks the action at the "Solvay" meetings, scientific conferences held at an institute in Brussels in the twenties. (Ernest Solvay was a rich Belgian chemist with a taste for high science.) Einstein and Niels Bohr met and argued over breakfast and dinner there, talking past each other more than to each other. Musser writes, "Bohr punted on Einstein's central concern about links between distant locations in space," preferring to focus on the disputes about probability and randomness in nature. As Musser says, the "indeterminacy" questions of whether what you measured was actually indefinite or just unknowable until you measured it was an important point, but not *this* important point.

Musser explains that the big issue was settled mainly by being pushed aside. Generational imperatives trumped evidentiary ones. The things that made Einstein the lovable genius of popular imagination were also the things that made him an easy object of condescension. The hot younger theorists patronized him, one of Bohr's colleagues sneering that if a student had raised Einstein's objections "I would have considered him quite intelligent and promising."

There was never a decisive debate, never a hallowed crucial experiment, never even a winning argument to settle the case, with one physicist admitting, "Most physicists (including me) accept that Bohr won the debate, although like most physicists I am hard pressed to put into words just how it was done." Arguing about non-locality went out of fashion, in this account, almost the way "Rock Around the Clock" displaced Sinatra from the top of the charts.

The same pattern of avoidance and talking-past and taking on the temper of the times turns up in the contemporary science that has returned to the pos-

sibility of non-locality. Musser notes that Geoffrey Chew's attack on the notion of underlying laws in physics "was radical, and radicalism went over well in '60s-era Berkeley." The British mathematician Roger Penrose's assaults on string theory in the nineties were intriguing but too intemperate and too inconclusive for the room: "Penrose didn't help his cause with his outspoken skepticism.... Valid though his critiques might have been, they weren't calculated to endear him to his colleagues."

Indeed, Musser, though committed to empirical explanation, suggests that the revival of "non-locality" as a topic in physics may be due to our finding the metaphor of non-locality ever more palatable: "Modern communications technology may not technically be non-local but it sure feels that it is." Living among distant connections, where what happens in Bangalore happens in Boston, we are more receptive to the idea of such a strange order in the universe. Musser sums it up in an enviable aphorism: "If poetry is emotion recollected in tranquility, then science is tranquility recollected in emotion." The seemingly neutral order of the natural world becomes the sounding board for every passionate feeling the physicist possesses.

Is science, then, a club like any other, with fetishes and fashions, with schemers, dreamers, and blackballed applicants? Is there a real demarcation to be made between science and every other kind of social activity? One of Musser's themes is that the boundary between inexplicable-seeming magical actions and explicable physical phenomena is a fuzzy one. The lunar theory of tides is an instance. Galileo's objection to it was like Einstein's to the quantum theory: that the moon working an occult influence on the oceans was obviously magical nonsense. This objection became Newton's point: occult influences could be understood soberly and would explain the movement of the stars and planets. What was magic became mathematical and then mundane. "Magical" explanations, like spooky action, are constantly being revived and rebuffed, until, at last, they are reinterpreted and accepted. Instead of a neat line between science and magic, then, we see a jumpy, shifting boundary that keeps getting

redrawn. It's like the "Looney Tunes" cartoon where Bugs draws a line in the dirt and dares Yosemite Sam to "just cross over dis line"—and then, when Sam does, Bugs redraws it, over and over, ever backward, until, in the end, Sam steps over a cliff. Real-world demarcations between science and magic, Musser's story suggests, are like Bugs's: made on the move and as much a trap as a teaching aid.

In the past several decades, certainly, the old lines between the history of astrology and astronomy, and between alchemy and chemistry, have been blurred; historians of the scientific revolution no longer insist on a clean break between science and earlier forms of magic. Where once logical criteria between science and non-science (or pseudo-science) were sought and taken seriously—Karl Popper's criterion of "falsifiability" was perhaps the most famous, insisting that a sound theory could, in principle, be proved wrong by one test or another—many historians and philosophers of science have come to think that this is a naïve view of how the scientific enterprise actually works. They see a muddle of coercion, old magical ideas, occasional experiment, hushed-up failures—all coming together in a social practice that gets results but rarely follows a definable logic.

Yet the old notion of a scientific revolution that was really a revolution is regaining some credibility. David Wootton, in his new, encyclopedic history, "The Invention of Science" (Harper), recognizes the blurred lines between magic and science but insists that the revolution lay in the public nature of the new approach. "What killed alchemy was not experimentation," he writes. He goes on:

What killed alchemy was the insistence that experiments must be openly reported in publications which presented a clear account of what had happened, and they must then be replicated, preferably before independent witnesses. The alchemists had pursued a secret learning, convinced that only a few were fit to have knowledge of divine secrets and that the social order would collapse if gold ceased to be in short supply. . . . Esoteric knowledge was replaced by a new form of knowledge, which depended both on publication and on public or semi-public performance. A closed society was replaced by an open one.

In a piquant way, Wootton, while making little of Popper's criterion of fal-

sifiability, makes it up to him by borrowing a criterion from his political philosophy. Scientific societies are open societies. One day the lunar tides are occult, the next day they are science, and what changes is the way in which we choose to talk about them.

Wootton also insists, against the grain of contemporary academia, that single observed facts, what he calls "killer facts," really did polish off antique authorities. Facts are not themselves obvious: the fact of the fact had to be invented, litigated, and re-litigated. But, once we agree that the facts *are* facts, they can do amazing work. Traditional Ptolemaic astronomy, in place for more than a millennium, was destroyed by what Galileo discovered about the phases of Venus. That killer fact "serves as a single, solid, and strong argument to establish its revolution around the Sun, such that no room whatsoever remains for doubt," Galileo wrote, and Wootton adds, "No one was so foolish as to dispute these claims." Observation was theory-soaked—Wootton shows a delightful drawing of a crater on the moon that does not actually exist, drawn by a dutiful English astronomer who had just been reading Galileo—and facts were, as always, tempered by our desires. But there they were, all the same, smiling fiendishly, like cartoon barracudas, as they ate up old orbits.

Several things flow from Wootton's view. One is that "group think" in the sciences is often true think. Science has always been made in a cloud of social networks. But this power of assent is valuable only if there's a willingness to look a killer fact in the eye. The Harvard theoretical physicist Lisa Randall's new book, "Dark Matter and the Dinosaurs" (Ecco), has as its arresting central thesis the idea that a disk of dark matter might exist in the Milky Way, perturbing the orbits of comets and potentially sending them periodically toward Earth, where they are likely to produce large craters and extinctions. But the theory is plausible only because a single killer fact murdered an earlier theory—which held that an unseen star was out there, doing the perturbing and the extingting. Every newer orbiting telescope has scanned the skies, and the so-called Nemesis star hasn't shown up. Disks of

dark matter can now appear in the space left empty by the star's absence.

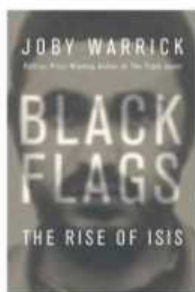
A similar pattern is apparent in the case of the search for "Vulcan," the hypothesized planet that, in the nineteenth century, sat between Mercury and the sun and explained perturbations in Mercury's orbit. As Thomas Levenson explains in "The Hunt for Vulcan" (Random House), nineteenth-century astronomers were so in love with the idea of the missing planet that many of them, bewitched by random shadows, insisted they had seen it through their telescopes. Only in 1915, when Einstein emerged with a new interpretation of the perturbations (something to do with gravity as space-time curvature), could astronomers stop "seeing" what wasn't there.

There has been much talk in the pop-sci world of "memes"—ideas that somehow manage to replicate themselves in our heads. But perhaps the real memes are not ideas or tunes or artifacts but ways of making them—*habits* of mind rather than *products* of mind. Science isn't a slot machine, where you drop in facts and get out truths. But it is a special kind of social activity, one where lots of different human traits—obstinacy, curiosity, resentment of authority, sheer cussedness, and a grudging readiness to submit pet notions to popular scrutiny—end by producing reliable knowledge. The spread of Bill James's ideas on baseball, from mimeographed sheets to the front offices of the Red Sox, is a nice instance of how a scientific turn of mind spread to a place where science hadn't usually gone. (James himself knew it, remarking that if he was going to be Galileo someone had to be the Pope.)

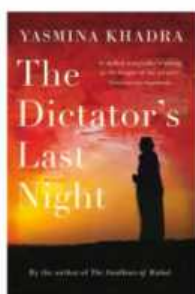
One way or another, science really happens. The claim that basic research is valuable because it leads to applied technology may be true but perhaps is not at the heart of the social use of the enterprise. The way scientists do think makes us aware of how we *can* think. Samuel Johnson said that a performer riding on three horses may not accomplish anything, but he increases our respect for the faculties of man. The scientists who show that nature rides three horses at once—or even two horses, on opposite sides of the universe—also widen our respect for what we are capable of imagining, and it is this action, at its own spooky distance, that really entangles our minds. ♦



## BRIEFLY NOTED



**BLACK FLAGS**, by Joby Warrick (Doubleday). This account of the emergence of ISIS examines in painful detail the consequences of the Bush Administration's misadventures in Iraq. Trying to justify the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. government publicized the activities of the previously obscure Islamist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Warrick charts Zarqawi's rise from booze-swilling Jordanian street tough to one of the most brutal jihadists in the world. He demonstrates how much the militants of the Islamic State owe to Zarqawi, who was killed in 2006—not only their ideology but even the color of the jumpsuits that prisoners wear in execution videos. The militants of ISIS, one of Warrick's sources explains, are the “children of Zarqawi.”



**THE DICTATOR'S LAST NIGHT**, by Yasmina Khadra, translated from the French by Julian Evans (Gallic). This mesmerizing novel is written from the perspective of Muammar Qaddafi as he hides with a band of loyalists in an abandoned school, in the days before being lynched by a crowd of rebels, in October, 2011. Bitter at having been betrayed by the Libyans, whom he believes he rescued from an unremarkable fate, he tends to narcissistic outbursts: “I am like God. The world I made has turned against me.” Unforgiving, unrepentant, and vicious, Khadra's Qaddafi is also mercurial—sentimental when recalling his Bedouin childhood, darkly funny when mocking Arab dictators who accede too easily in the face of their people's demands.



**THE HUNDRED YEAR FLOOD**, by Matthew Salesses (Little A). In this debut novel, a young Korean-American man travels to Prague, not entirely sure whether the journey is an escape or an adventure, and forms a fraught relationship with a Czech artist and his wife. Falling squarely into the American Abroad Bildungsroman category, the book falters when it uses the genre's staples: cryptic pronouncements by bewitching ladies, mysterious locals and locales. The climax, during the titular flood, is more successful. As waters rise, crowded with escaped zoo animals, mannequins, and ghosts, the protagonist muses, “How strange the way we waded into disaster, step after step, not realizing how far we've gone until we're drowning.”



**LAFAYETTE IN THE SOMEWHAT UNITED STATES**, by Sarah Vowell (Riverhead). This freewheeling history of the Revolutionary War centers on Lafayette, who, in 1777, disobeyed Louis XVI to fight on the American side. “The Marquis is determined to be in the way of danger,” Washington wrote, and, indeed, Lafayette wrote that the gunshot wound he received at the Battle of Brandywine Creek was “the most beautiful thing in the world.” Vowell points out that Lafayette was for a time “a national obsession”: eighty thousand New Yorkers turned out to welcome him when he made a later trip from France, in 1824. Without the French forces he helped recruit, Cornwallis would not have surrendered at Yorktown—a fact that Vowell, incensed by current partisan politics, wishes “freedom fries” advocates would remember.



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# TRUE SELVES

*"The Danish Girl" and "Mustang."*

BY ANTHONY LANE



*Eddie Redmayne and Alicia Vikander in a movie directed by Tom Hooper.*

The new Tom Hooper film, "The Danish Girl," begins in Copenhagen, in 1926. We are introduced to a married couple, Einar Wegener (Eddie Redmayne) and his wife, Gerda (Alicia Vikander). They seem touchingly young, like earnest teen-agers playing at adult life, and, despite the fact that both of them are artists, we sense little rivalry or spite. Gerda is painting a portrait of Ulla (Amber Heard), a ballerina, and, one day, when Ulla is late, Einar takes her place. Gently, he dons ballet shoes and silk stockings—just for fun, although the donning earns such close and reverent attention from the camera that something more than amusement, clearly, is at stake.

Other signs are there to be read. Einar, on a backstage visit to the ballet, runs his hand in rapture along a rack of costumes. At home, he slips into his wife's nightgown. Far from being alarmed, she is sympathetic and even mildly aroused by this silken theft. Hence the next step: Gerda goes to an artists' ball, taking Einar along not only in drag, decked out in a wig and a long gown, but in the complete guise of an-

other person, who is introduced as Lili Elbe, Einar's cousin. Few of the guests look askance; one of them, indeed, an impassioned fellow named Henrik (Ben Whishaw), engages Lili in conversation, and, in the seclusion of another room, bestows a kiss. Does he think he's embracing a him, or a her?

Einar flees, bewildered but undeterred. The impulse to unearth a buried self grows ever stronger, and, by a fetching symmetry, so does Gerda's career as an artist. She now paints nudes, which combine Lili's face with the female physique that Lili yearns to possess, and these idealizing works begin to sell. The couple spend time in Paris, partly in the company of Hans (Matthias Schoenaerts), a strapping art dealer. He was a boyhood pal of Einar, who now shows up as Lili. By this stage, the movie is rife with confusions of every type, and Hooper handles them with clarity, grace, and a surprising urgency, far more at ease in this intimate drama than he was with the super-sized galumphings of "Les Misérables." He is right to be urgent, because Lili and Gerda are all too aware that, for those

who are sentenced to lifelong incarceration in the wrong form, a change of clothes is not enough.

Einar Wegener was a real person, and "The Danish Girl" is based on a novel, of the same title, by David Ebershoff, which retells the tale of Lili, and honors her determination to undergo transgender surgery. She was one of the first people to brave the procedure, and the movie finds her travelling to Dresden and entering into the care of Dr. Warnekros (Sebastian Koch). Once again, Gerda offers loyal support, and viewers may be bemused by the depth of such forbearance. You wonder what would have happened if, when Einar first started borrowing her lingerie, she had thrown him out. Would he still have forged ahead? Did neither of them have any relatives, in what was then a fairly solid Lutheran society, who registered horror or scorn at his transforming? If so, why do we not see them?

The truth is that "The Danish Girl" is, for all its eminent skills, the victim of its own decency. Nothing rude or untoward has been admitted; when the word "penis" is mentioned, it rings out like a gunshot, and anyone who snickers when Henrik says to Lili, "You're not like other girls," may well be asked to leave the cinema. From Shakespeare to "Shakespeare in Love," fluidity of gender was a great dramatic staple, touched with sexual inquisitiveness and flourishes of farce. No longer. As the Caitlyn Jenner saga has confirmed, the visual and verbal language of the subject has become a minefield, and Hooper's film is a master class in how to tiptoe through the mines. It swoons from a surfeit of good taste. The Copenhagen interiors are modelled, with aching fidelity, on the paintings of the Danish artist Vilhelm Hammershøi, who died in 1916, and the same nicety gilds everything from garments to complexions. Lili, reclining in a bath chair, exquisitely pained by her operation, could be a quieter, paler kinswoman of Mimi, in "La Bohème."

Few actors can conjure that pitch of frailty with a straight face, and "The Danish Girl" would be unfeasible without Eddie Redmayne. To be honest, he's so outrageously pretty to begin with that the journey into feminine loveliness is for him little more than a sidestep. (Did I detect a faint testiness



in Vikander as she realizes that, for once, she must settle for being the second-most-beautiful creature on-screen?) I struggled hard to picture Steve Buscemi, say, in the role of Einar, but nothing came, and, likewise, were you to swap the stately trio of Copenhagen, Paris, and Dresden for downtown Pittsburgh, the film would swiftly collapse. What rescues it, then, from complacency? The answer, I think, is not simply Redmayne's performance but his acute realization that Einar, too, is a performer of the first rank. Observing women at the fishmonger's, as their fingers circle briefly and then point at their fish of choice, he slyly copies the motion. Better yet, in the dimly lit highlight of the film, he visits a peep-show, in Paris, where a naked model feigns her pleasure behind a glass screen; rather than leering, however, Einar studies her devoutly, his imagination hungering toward her. To know the desires of another body, and to learn them by heart: that, Redmayne suggests, is the path to becoming yourself.

**I**n a Turkish village near the sea, six hundred miles or so from Istanbul, live five sisters. The youngest and the boldest, Lale (Güneş Nezihe Şensoy), looks around twelve. Then, in ascending order, we have Nur (Doğa Zeynep Doğuşlu), Ece (Elit Işcan), Selma (Tuğba Sunguroğlu), and Sonay (İlayda Akdoğan). Orphaned years ago, they have been raised by their grandmother (Nihal Koldaş), with assistance from their mean uncle, Erol (Ayberk Pekcan). The sisters are close, often intertwined in languid larks, and they make

a fine team. All of them attend the same school, and, on the last day of the spring term, they race to the beach and splash around, sitting on the shoulders of boys—their fellow-pupils—to stage a mock battle in the water. If that reminds you of “Spring Breakers,” glistening with beer and bikinis, think again; the girls are fully clothed, and they run home none the worse, in a state of sportive bliss.

Such, it turns out, is the moment of paradise lost. The sea romp, the girls protest, was only a game. “There’s no such game,” their grandmother says. Erol calls them “sullied.” Their antics, glimpsed by a neighbor, have brought shame upon their house, which, from here on, is hardened into a jail. Exits are blocked, and bars are later welded onto the windows; fripperies like phones, computers, and makeup are confiscated; in public, T-shirts and denim shorts are replaced by what Lale, whose voice-over we occasionally hear, describes as “shapeless, shit-colored dresses.” But the jail is also, in her words, “a wife factory,” and soon both Sonay and Selma are married off, not merely in accordance with custom but also, we sense, in haste, before they can land themselves in more trouble. And what of the remaining three sisters? How can they duck the same fate?

“Mustang” is the debut feature of Deniz Gamze Ergüven, and it’s quite something: a coming-of-age fable mapped onto a prison break, at once dream-hazed and sharp-edged with suspense. Note the care, too, with which Ergüven and her co-screenwriter, Alice Winocour, maintain their moral poise.

Most audiences will reel in dismay as the older girls are summoned to a “virginity report,” or as family members knock on the door of a bridal chamber, midway through the wedding night, and ask to inspect the sheets. Yet Sonay, for one, actually loves her groom, having often sneaked out to see him after dark. As for the grandmother, she’s no witchy crone but a tired and kindly figure who can hardly be hated for clutching at the roots of old traditions. “I didn’t know my husband at all,” she recalls, “but I grew to love him.”

The film will be of most use, perhaps, to anyone who is teaching “Pride and Prejudice” to a bunch of teen-agers. They will relish the scenes in which the five sisters, showing slightly more initiative than the Bennet girls, escape to watch a soccer match, from which all male spectators have been banned. The question that Ergüven puts, in the context of modern Turkey, is one that Jane Austen might have recognized: How, as a young woman, can you preserve not just your modesty but also your freedom of spirit and the play of your wits, when the purpose of your being, as laid down in social laws, resides in the finding of a man? How much of *you* remains, in that transaction? A fear of the answer shines most clearly, and most fiercely, in the eyes of a child—of Lale, who sees the future surging toward her, like the waves at the start of the film. She is the heroine of this bright and busy movie. She will not be drowned. ♦

#### NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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## CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

*Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Michael Maslin, must be received by Sunday, November 29th. The finalists in the November 16th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 14th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit [contest.newyorker.com](http://contest.newyorker.com).*

### THE WINNING CAPTION



*"It's unplugged. I'm not an idiot."*  
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### THE FINALISTS

*"We've been hacked!"*  
Cary Dikinis, Tucson, Ariz.

*"Put him through."*  
Boback Ziaieian, Los Angeles, Calif.

*"Quick! Your pen!"*  
Corey Keller, New York City

### THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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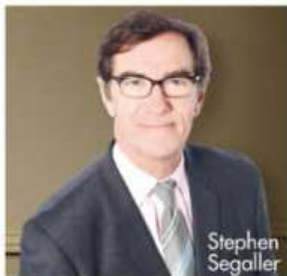




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